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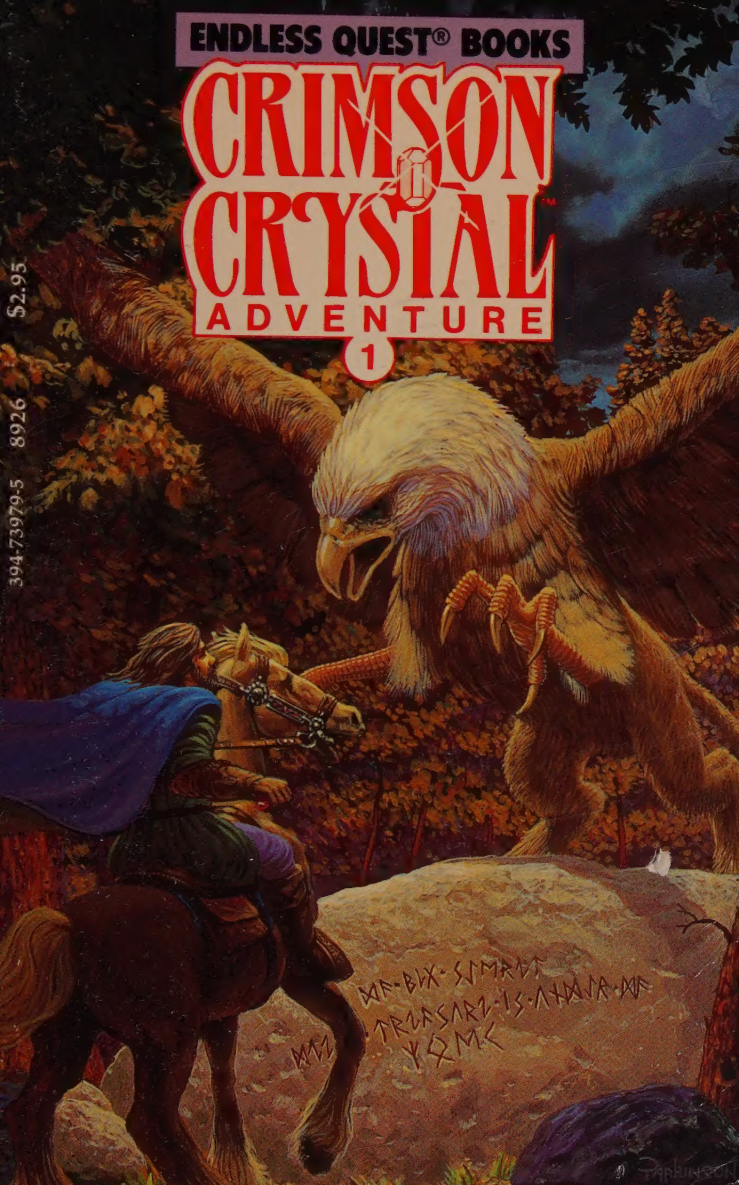

RIDDLE OF THE GRIFFON

by Susan Lawson

Lift the CRIMSON CRYSTAL™ Screen at the top of the page and see what happens. The magic crystal disappears! Replace the screen, and the crystal reappears.

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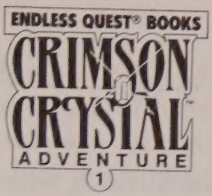

RIDDLE OF THE GRIFFON

by Susan Lawson

A PICK A PATH TO ADVENTURE™ Book

Cover art by Keith Parkinson
Interior art by Mario D. Macari
and Gary Williams

For Patrick Lucien Price

"Why be difficult when with
a little effort you can be
totally impossible?"

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"Do I have to go in there?" you ask your father, peering inside a window of the ancient cottage. You see nothing but your bearded face staring back at you. It is dark as night in these woods, though it's only the middle of the day. You shiver, but not from the brisk autumn air.

Drawing back hurriedly, you say, "Let's go to the festival and come back later."

"That's the trouble with you, Garik," says a voice through the open door of the cottage. "You have all the skill and talent to be a great magician, but all you can think about is having a good time with your friends."

A bearded old man wearing robes and a magician's cap shuffles to the doorway.

"I don't know if he's the right one, Marell," he says to your father. "He doesn't take his abilities seriously—despite the danger associated with having them."

Your father sighs. "I'm not sure myself."

You avoid your father's stern gaze. The old magician's right, you know. It is a dangerous thing, being a magician these days when so many of your profession have vanished or been murdered by King Parthon's guards.

Your father escaped only because he has pretended to be a farmer. Secretly he taught you magic, and you're delighted that he did. But you also enjoy having fun with your friends.

"I took my studies seriously," your father reminds you.

"All right," you mumble impatiently. "I sup-

pose I might as well get this over with."

"Now remember, Garik," your father says, "old Simon is the highest ranking wizard of our order. Listen to what he says to you today. It will have a great influence on your life."

"Yes, sir," you say. All you want is to get through this silly ritual and then get to the harvest festival. Of course, it might not be very festive, with that tyrant Parthon and his guards watching everybody. Still, a party is a party.

Shaking his head, your father walks away, leaving you alone with the old wizard.

"Come in, then," Simon orders.

Once inside, the old man abruptly places something in your hands. As your eyes grow accustomed to the darkness, you see that it's a box, an ornately carved box.

Simon sits in a chair and stares at you.

"So *you're* the one we've been waiting for!" The old man snorts in disgust.

"Waiting for what?" you ask, confused.

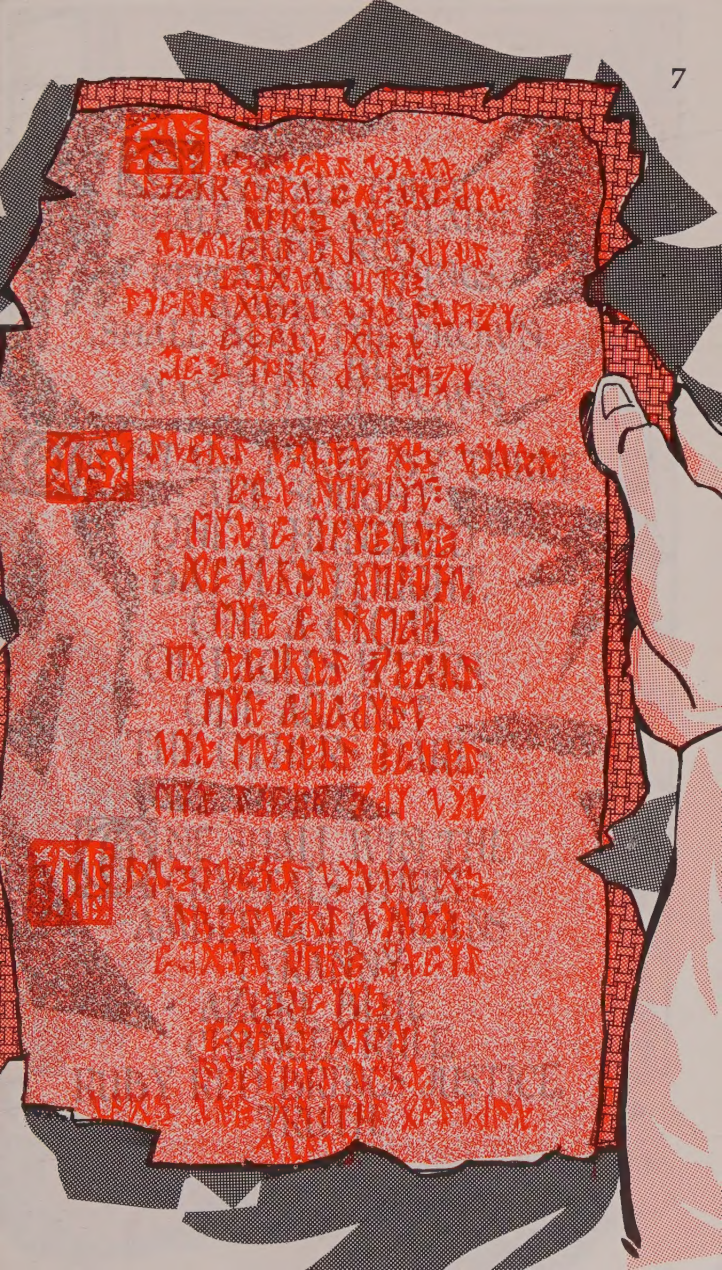
"I've been waiting for someone to answer the griffon's riddle, find the Blue Crystal, and defeat Parthon."

"What?" you say, taken aback. "Are you sure you've got the right guy?"

"I wish I could say otherwise," Simon says, looking you up and down. "But, you're the one I saw in the crystal ball. I had hoped it would be a serious young conjurer. Instead . . ."

"Now, wait just a minute—" you begin.

"Oh, well," the old man interrupts, a twinkle in



his eye. "If you're not the right one, someone else will be along eventually."

"I *am* the right one!" you shout. What am I saying? you think. Answering griffon's riddles, defeating Parthon—I must be crazy!

"We'll see," the old man says. "Now sit down here and open the box."

As you move to the chair he indicates, you notice shelf after shelf of books. Your eyes widen. Those are spellbooks! Your father has only one or two, and he's a high-level magician. This Simon must be truly powerful.

"Open the box," he repeats softly.

Your hands feel a warmth—an energy— radiating from the box. Carefully you open it.

Inside is a brilliant red jewel, almost as long as your hand and resting on a piece of parchment.

"A ruby!" you gasp.

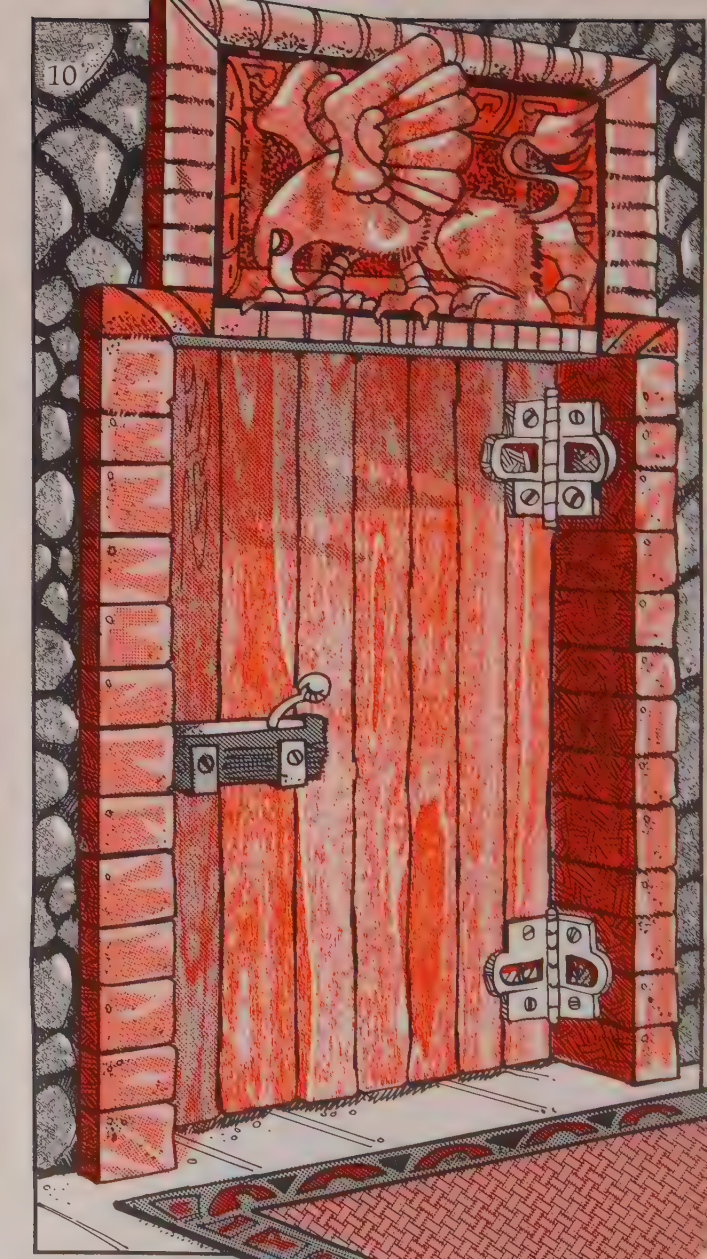
"A magical gem," Simon corrects you.

"You mean, like the one Parthon wears around his neck?" you say, gently touching it.

"Yes," Simon says. "Only the king's is yellow. This is red. His is a Crystal of Rulership. This a Crystal of Divination. Hold it up to your eyes and look through it at the parchment."

You obey, and as you hold up the crystal, it begins to glow deep crimson.

❖ *Look through your Red Crystal at the picture on page 7 and read the parchment. Then turn to page 53 and continue reading.*



"I have an idea," you say, looking around the torture room. "If this is Goswar's old magic room, maybe he left something around that could help us escape and find the Blue Crystal." You raise the Red Crystal to your eyes, focusing particularly on the carved writing on the walls of the room.

"I really don't think there'd be anything here to help us," Andria says. "Parthon wouldn't have left anything valuable behind when he turned the room into a torture chamber."

"Regardless . . ." you start to say. But the Red Crystal in your hand glows, and you stop talking as you look through it.

❖ *Look at the picture on the next page with your Red Crystal.*

You smile. "Guess what?" you say, pointing at the ceiling. "There's something written up there. Goswar left us a clue after all."

Andria looks at the ceiling, puzzled. "So what does it say? I can't read it."

"It says, 'On stone a window, false and true, at sunset red will find the blue.'"

You start to walk over to the only window in the chamber, carefully avoiding the bones and other litter on the floor. Your skin crawls when you pass some skeletons. How easily you could have become one!

"Wait a minute!" Andria calls. You stop before you get to the window. Then you hear a thump-

ing sound coming from the hall outside the chamber.

"They've discovered us!" Andria grabs at the door handle to hold it shut. "Hurry and do something!"

"What?" you yell back, getting more nervous by the minute.

"Anything!" Andria screeches as the door handle is almost pulled from her grasp. She pulls it tight again, but you can tell she won't be able to keep it up. Andria doesn't look particularly strong.

You spin around to look at the window again. It is almost sunset now. The red light of the sun casts a shadow of the barred window against the far wall, between two skeletons hanging in chains.

Could the "window" be the image of the window on the stone wall? Or is it the real window in the chamber?

You have just enough time to use the Red Crystal once, before the guards break into the room. You summon your courage, raise the Red Crystal, and aim it at . . .

1) . . . the real window; turn to page 136.

2) . . . the shadow of the window on the wall; turn to page 43.

Riding hard, you soon come to the base of the mountain, where you locate the trail easily.

As you ride, you wonder that you never noticed the griffon's nest before. It's easy to see—now that you know where to look.

Rounding a bend, you see a huge boulder covered with strange runes—like those on your parchment! You rein in your horse.

The Red Crystal! Hurriedly you lift it to your eyes and stare through it at the boulder.

❖ *To read the runes, look through your Red Crystal at the picture on the next page.*

The griffon's name! What was it! Simon told you in his letter, but you're not sure you remember! You reach your hand in for the letter but realize the sunlight's gone.

A sudden screeching noise freezes your blood! It sounds like an eagle! It's the griffon, and he's coming right for you!

1) You remember the griffon's name. Turn to page 94.

2) You don't remember the name, but you do remember he won't hurt you if you have the Red Crystal. Turn to page 42.

3) You don't remember the griffon's name, and you want to risk casting a magic spell, turn to page 74.

"Simon says the red Crystal of Divination will show me the griffon's nest," you murmur, reading the letter again. "I might as well try and see if it works. First, though, I better get to where I've got a good view of King's Mountain.

You start walking out of the woods and begin to realize that it's going to be dark in about an hour. By the time you reach the foothills of King's Mountain, it will be too dark to see the nest.

You no sooner think this thought than you hear a loud whinny behind you! Nearly jumping out of your skin from the suddenness of the sound, you whirl around and stare in astonishment. Standing in the path—fully saddled—is a most splendid white stallion!

"What in the world—" you gasp.

The horse seems to beckon to you, and then it occurs to you that this could be the 'help' Simon mentioned in his letter.

"Well, whether or not he sent you, boy, I need a ride," you say and leap onto the horse's back. The animal breaks into a swift gallop, and you ride through the forest as fast as the wind. Within moments, it seems, you reach the edge. There, rising before you, is King's Mountain.

Though you've lived in the shadow of King's Mountain all your life, you now realize that you never took a good look at the peak before.

You see Parthon's Castle standing at the foot of the mountain. Its tall battlements gleam in the last rays of the sun. The mountain towers above the castle. It is an old mountain, and though rug-

ged, it looks fairly easy to climb—you hope.

But stare as hard as you might, and you cannot find anything that looks like the aerie of a griffon.

"Well, here goes," you mutter. Taking the Red Crystal from its box, you raise it to your eye and peer at the mountain through it.

❖ *Use your Red Crystal on the picture on page 16 to find the location of the griffon's nest.*

As you scan the mountainside, you see nothing at first. Then suddenly your eye catches a flash of red light halfway up the slope.

You lower the crystal and stare at the spot—nothing. Lifting the crystal to your eye again, you see it—the beam of light!

"The griffon's aerie," you say in awe. "It *must* be!" Looking at the crystal, you shake your head in bewilderment. "I didn't really believe in the power of this rock, but with it I just might succeed on this quest after all!"

Digging your heels into the horse's flanks, you gallop forward as visions of being king flash through your mind.

Even from a distance you can see that the griffon's nest is perched on an outcropping of rock that juts out one side of the mountain east of the castle itself.

"Good," you think grimly. "I won't have to get anywhere near the castle itself. Even though Parthon's going to be in the harvest festival parade, his guards would be watching. This way

I can ride up the side of the mountain without being seen. I just hope I can reach it before nightfall."

Riding hard to reach the mountain before the sun sets, you gallop out of the forest heedlessly, forgetting to check for Parthon's guards. Too late, you see one patrolling the area on his own horse.

"Hey! Stop there!" he shouts, catching sight of you.

"Oh, no!" you groan. "I knew there were guards around. Why wasn't I more cautious? Now what do I do?"

I can make a run for it, you think, and hope that this horse, if it is from Simon, is faster than the thoroughbreds King Parthon buys—or steals—for his troops. Or should I stop and try to bluff my way out of this?

1) Make a run for it. Turn to page 41.

2) Try to talk your way out. Turn to page 26.

"Hey, Garik," one of your friends asks with interest. "What's in the box?"

"The Crystal of Divination," you say, thinking that your friends will be pretty impressed with you. "I'm going to go on a quest and get rid of that stupid King Parth—"

Your friends suddenly fall back from you in fright, looking at something behind you. A thick, muscular arm reaches over your shoulder and seizes the box with the crystal in it right out of your hands.

"Gimme that ruby, kid!" commands the mercenary guard who was passing by. To his and your astonishment, the Red Crystal suddenly vanishes from the box!

The mercenary calls urgently for more guards as your friends run off. You try to flee, too, but the guard throws you against a wall and holds you until help arrives.

"You're in trouble now, you treasonous young fool," the mercenary sneers as you are led to the castle. "You'll answer to the king as soon as he comes back from receiving homage at the harvest festival in town."

After an hour's wait, you are hustled into the throne room under heavy guard. King Parthon is already seated on the ornate golden chair Goswar used to occupy. You see him finger the jewel-encrusted arm lovingly.

"Here's the prisoner, Your Majesty," one of the guards says. "He's the one who had the Red Crystal before it vanished."

You look into Parthon's face, crossed with scars from his many battles as a general. He looks back at you with dark, cold eyes.

"Garik is your name, correct?" Parthon asks quietly. His voice is sharp as a knife.

You feel the chill of fear run down your spine. "Uh, yes, sir," you mumble.

Parthon looks at you for a long moment more. "Garik, I've killed a hundred men in my lifetime, maybe more. I see no reason not to add you to the total. Tell me about the Red Crystal and tell me now."

You feel a rush of anger. "I'll tell you nothing!" you yell.

A faint smile appears on Parthon's face. "Oh, you'll tell me everything. I can beat it out of you in the torture room, I could use my Crystal of Rulership on you and make you talk, or you can tell me of your own free will."

You can't betray your father and old Simon to this evil man! But what else can you do?

A wild thought comes to you. If you could cast a spell here in the throne room, everyone might be startled enough to give you a chance to escape. If you don't try something, you'll soon be in the torture chamber!

1) If you try to escape using your magic, turn to page 69.

2) If you'd rather not test your magic, turn to page 120.

"We better leave the door open," you decide. "It may be our only way out of here. Besides, maybe we'll find the Blue Crystal before Parthon figures out a way up here."

The griffon shrugs his winged shoulders. "Up to you, kid. You'll look nice, hanging by your thumbs from a wall in the dungeon."

"All right. Why don't *you* get rid of Parthon if you're so tough?" you snap.

"I can't touch him," Leo says sadly, "not while he wears the Yellow Crystal. Its power is too great even for me. And remember, if he catches you, he'll use the crystal to charm you into obeying him. Besides, even though he can't charm me, he brings me nice gifts."

"He kept trying to bribe you to open the mountain—and all the time you never really knew how to open the door either!" you exclaim.

A fierce look comes into Leo's eyes. "I consider it just," the griffon says. "I was truly fond of Goswar, you know. And if I ever catch Parthon without that Yellow Crystal!" He snaps his beak viciously.

"Right, well—" you glance out the door nervously "—we better be getting along."

The moonshine lights the inside of the cavern but only for a short distance.

"We'll need light," you say. Spotting a torch on the wall, you lift it out and light it, using the tinderbox in one of your pockets.

Please turn to page 46.

Frantically you run back up the corridor. The troll is right behind you.

Glancing back over your shoulder, you notice that this troll looks in bad shape. After all, you think, it must not have eaten anything, except rats maybe, for two years—ever since Goswar sealed the entrances into the mountain! The beast must be awfully hungry!

The slobbering sounds you hear the troll making convince you that you're right. You run faster and faster until you reach the door.

Once there, you remember Leo saying your key wouldn't let you out! Fearfully you turn around. The troll's tongue is hanging out of its mouth in anticipation of dinner. The monster stares at you hungrily.

"Help, Leo!" you scream in panic.

But you hear nothing. The griffon is gone. You're on your own.

1) If you decide to use your Burning Hands spell, turn to page 109.

2) If you want to see whether the Red Crystal can help somehow, continue reading.

Reaching into your pocket, you discover that the Red Crystal has vanished—just like Simon said it would if you got into trouble. You are trapped. The troll is closing in.

THE END

I'll talk my way out of this, you think smugly. You slow your horse to a trot.

"What are you doing in these woods?" the guard demands suspiciously.

"Just hunting squirrels for dinner."

The guard scowls, and you see instantly that he doesn't believe you. Too late, you remember your mother telling you that she could spot you in a lie a mile away.

"Where'd you get this horse, kid? You don't look rich enough to buy it."

"Uh," you falter, "s-someone gave it to me for a, uh, present. Today's my birthday."

"Yeah, and I'm a griffon!" the guard snorts. "Hey, Nyk! Come here! I got a good one!"

Looking up, you see a second guard galloping down the road, and you realize you're finished.

"Get down off that horse!" the first guard orders you. "We'll take this animal to King Parthon. He'll reward us well."

Unhappily, you slide down off the horse. Patting the animal's neck, you whisper, "Thanks anyway, fella."

Suddenly the animal bolts off, streaking like lightning back into the forest. In vain the guards try to stop it, and you know you could have outrun them easily.

Moments later, you're on your way to King Parthon, stripped of the Red Crystal.

Please turn to page 22.

Your hand strays to the chest that glows with magical power. That would be the obvious choice. . . .

. . . but maybe being obvious is the trap. A crystal that overcomes magic would not be seen as magical. It sounds like a long shot, but it's six of one and half a dozen of the other.

You reach instead for the nonmagical chest, crouching away from it in case something flies out of the box when you open it. With one quickly withdrawn fingertip, you flip back the lid.

A soft blue radiance floods the dark chamber. Your astonished eyes see past the radiance to look upon an enormous shining gem of crystalline blue, blue as a clear summer's sky, pure as air and water.

In gold lettering, the words "Crystal of Change" are written on the inside of the box, on the cushion that holds the gem itself.

"Oh, my gosh!" Andria gasps. "Oh, my gosh! It's *beautiful*!"

Your mouth is dry with a mixture of fear and excitement as you reach down and grasp the giant crystal. It feels cool to the touch as it fills your hand.

"I think we've got what we came for," you say, awe in your voice. Just to be sure, you raise your Red Crystal and look through it at the Blue Crystal. No magical radiation can be seen around the blue gem.

Andria steps nearer to you. As she does, the

light from her dagger dims until it almost vanishes. She hastily backs up.

Andria looks at you and smiles. You smile back. "I'll be a goatherder's son," you say. "It cancels magic. We did it."

After a few well-earned shrieks of joy and triumph, you and Andria look out in the hallway for any sign of Kitty, but the giant lynx is nowhere to be seen. The way is clear for you to make your way down the hallway.

"I'll make Grandpa take back everything he said about you," Andria says happily as she walks ahead of you, lighted dagger high, down a hall lined with dozens and dozens of stone pillars. It's only a short distance to the exit from Goswar's Caverns.

"What did he say about me?" you ask, not really caring at the moment.

"Oh, nothing. He just said you were an idiot doorknob with brains rented from astral space, and that you had a beard like peachfuzz and probably couldn't—"

"Okay! Okay, that's enough. Stop." You make a mental note to poke Simon in the nose when you see him again.

The Blue Crystal in your hand suddenly starts to glow again. You turn it over and over, wondering why. Then you notice a red glow coming from your pocket, where you had stored the Crystal of Divination.

"Uh, Andria, wait a—" you start to say, slowing down.

"Slow poke!" she calls back. "Bet I get back . . . before . . . "

Andria's voice fades away and you see that she is standing, seemingly frozen, in the hallway ahead of you, her back still turned toward you.

A yellow glow shines faintly from around a corner in the hallway ahead of her.

"Oh, no," you whisper. In a flash, you run up and grab Andria by the arm with one hand. Her face is blank. She's staring at the yellow glow.

Wordlessly, you drag Andria back behind a pillar. She shakes her head to clear the daze created by the yellow Crystal of Rulership's power to charm a person.

The yellow light floods down the hallway as you hear the slither of soft boots coming toward you.

"Garik."

You say nothing, not even daring to breathe for fear Parthon will detect your presence.

"Garik, I have your father in custody. He's being questioned by some of my assistants elsewhere in the castle. You can spare him and yourself a lot of pain and torment by surrendering yourself to me."

Still you say nothing. You look down and discover with horror that both the Blue and Red crystals are shining so brightly that you know Parthon can tell *exactly* where you're hidden!

"Do not take me lightly, Garik." The boots step closer, then stop. "I play for keeps, boy. I've fought and killed a hundred men in my life. It will

matter very little to me to add you to the list. Come on out."

You look at Andria. The Crystal of Change seems to have taken away the Yellow Crystal's control of her mind. She looks at you with terrified eyes.

1) If you decide to fight Parthon, turn to page 48.

2) If you would rather surrender to him, turn to page 60.

Sitting down beneath a tree, you decide to read the letter by the fading sunlight.

"Probably more riddles," you think gloomily. Unfolding it, you hold it up to see. Written in what must be Simon's spidery handwriting is the following:

One little thing I forgot to mention—Goswar's griffon often spoke prophecies in riddle form. If you're having trouble understanding the riddle (which I have no doubt you are) you might consider asking the griffon himself. He lives on King's Mountain.

He's a strange creature and very vicious if you get on the wrong side of him (which I'm sure you will). But he will not harm you as long as you carry the Red Crystal—because he wants it for himself.

The griffon knows that if anything happens to you, the crystal comes back to me. But be careful. If he takes it from you without harming you, I'm not certain what will happen. He might gain control of it, or the crystal might bring him back here!

In the meantime, don't turn down any help that might come your way. You'll need it!

Simon

P.S. I don't want a griffon in my living room!
P.S. 2 The griffon's name is Leo Aquila. "Leo" meaning "lion" and "Aquila" meaning "eagle." Clever, huh?

"Great advice," you mutter, "but how am I going to find the griffon's nest?"

Suddenly you notice a third postscript at the bottom of the parchment. You could have sworn it wasn't there before.

P.S. 3 I can hear you asking yourself now, "How do I find the griffon's nest?" You hold the answer in your hand, dummy!

"Of course, the Red Crystal!" you say. "But do I really want to *find* a griffon who's crunched up twenty or thirty of Parthon's best men? And do I want to do it all alone? Maybe I should get some help."

You scratch your beard in thought, wondering if it would be fair to ask your friends to go on such a dangerous quest.

1) You decide to take up this quest on your own. After all, you do have the Red Crystal. Turn to page 17.

2) You decide that a little help from your friends might not be a bad idea. You stuff the box with the crystal under your arm and head for the city. Turn to page 20.

Reaching the top of the stairs, you and Andria continue along the long, dark corridor ahead. Once in a while you hear twittering noises that might be bats, or the skittering of rats across the floor. But you know that you must keep moving.

Andria doesn't seem to be particularly bothered by the sounds, or at least she doesn't mention them. She walks ahead of you most of the time, using her lighted dagger to search the tunnels for traps.

As you approach a turn in the cavelike tunnel, she suddenly says, "Stop!" You follow her finger to where she points to a block of stone set in the floor.

"Walk around that stone, Garik," she commands. "Don't step on it."

"What if I do step on it?" you ask defiantly.

"You can try it for all I care," she snaps back. "You might *like* getting speared."

Silently, you study the stone, discovering a small, circular hole in its center.

"If I step on the stone, it fires a spear into me through this hole," you say, putting your observations together.

"I think so," she says. "But I'm sure not going to test it."

You swallow and step forward, walking around the trapped floor stone. Nothing happens, and Andria follows you.

"Maybe Grandpa was wrong about you being a chicken," she remarks. "He said you'd probably squawk and run like mad at the first sign of dan—"

"Knock it off!" you interrupt, tired of her comments. "Let's keep moving. We haven't got all day."

Minutes later, you walk around another bend in the tunnel and see a set of double doors ahead of you. You stop a few feet away from them.

Andria looks back nervously. "I thought I heard a noise behind us. You don't think something's following us, do you, Garik?"

You look at the door and then back at the darkness behind you. "I don't know," you whisper. "I could use the Red Crystal to look around. Maybe I could see if something's behind these doors."

"Like Kitty?" Andria says, trying to keep her voice light but not succeeding.

"Like Kitty," you say, reaching into your pocket.

"Wait," Andria says. "Maybe we'd better go back and see if something *is* following us from behind. If it is Parthon's men, they might see the Red Crystal and attack us to get it."

1) If you decide to use the crystal on the double doors, turn to page 130.

2) If instead you go back down the corridor, turn to page 52.

The first thing I have to do, you decide, is get rid of this oversized eagle. What excuse could I give? It would have to be good—he's smart . . .

"Oh no!" you shout, hoping the griffon can hear you above the rushing of the wind as he flies. "I left something I need in my saddlebags!"

"What?" Leo roars.

"I left something in my saddlebags!"

You think you hear the griffon mumbling in a very unfriendly tone. Then he says, "We're almost there."

Feeling brave, you suggest loudly, "Perhaps you could drop me off at your nest . . . "

You're not sure that Leo has heard you, but he says, "Then I'll go chase down your blasted horse."

Leo Aquila lands gracefully at his huge nest on the edge of the mountain. Taking one horrifying look down at the dizzying drop, you quickly slide off the griffon's back.

Maybe sending him away isn't such a good idea after all, you think. The wind whistles all around you, nearly blowing you from the airy perch.

"Uh, maybe it's not so important after all," you say, peering nervously over the edge of the aerie and gulping.

"It's all right," says Leo impatiently. "I'll go. And I won't harm the horse. I wouldn't eat one of Simon's magical creations for anything anyhow! I like *real* horseflesh!"

Preferring not to think about the griffon's

appetite, you just stammer, "P-please just bring me my—uh—saddlebags."

"Anything to oblige, I'm sure," Leo says sarcastically. "Make yourself at home." The griffon flies off, leaving you alone.

The full moon reveals your surroundings. You are in a huge, straw-lined nest. But there the resemblance to a normal nest ends. This one is filled with jewels, gold, and other objects so rich and precious you can only stare in amazement. Then you remember where this incredible wealth came from.

"Parthon must really want that Blue Crystal badly!" you realize nervously. "He's given Leo a fortune, not to mention the lives of his men. What am *I* doing here? He'd kill me like a bug if he caught me!"

Looking around, you see that the nest sits right in front of a huge stone door carved into the face of the mountain. That must be the way into Goswar's Caverns, you think in excitement. He must have had his griffon fly him up here. I wonder if Leo was allowed to go in with him, or if even he was kept outside.

You finger lightly through the jewels wondering if the key to the door is here, but you find nothing.

Fishing the box out of your pocket, you remove the Red Crystal and hold it up to your eye as you poke through the treasure again. It's a difficult task, especially since you have no idea what you're looking for. You only hope to find some

clue to tell you how to get inside the mountain.

There must be one, you think. Simon wouldn't have sent me here if there weren't.

You search and search. Suddenly you see a flash of red! There it is—something on the very edge of the nest.

❖ *Use your Red Crystal on the picture on page 142 to see what you find in the nest.*

Forgetting where you are in your eagerness to grab the object, you make a lunge for it.

"Who-oa!" you cry in terror! You've gone too far! Your foot trips and there you go—right out over the edge of the mountain ledge!

Arms flailing, you desperately grab for a handhold. Just when you think you're finished, you grasp a handful of straw. Now you're hanging from the edge of the cliff, holding on for dear life.

You glance down but realize instantly that was a mistake—there is *nothing* beneath you for hundreds of feet! Closing your eyes, you hold on tighter, but you know you can't hang on much longer. Kicking your feet, you try to find a foothold. There is nothing there. Despair almost makes you let go.

Suddenly you hear a welcome voice!

"What in the name of aerodynamics are you trying to do?"

"Leo!" you scream. "Save me! Help me! I'm falling!"

"I didn't think you were trying to fly," the grif-

fon grumbles as he lands on the ledge. "I've seen four-day-old chicks with more sense."

You feel the griffon's beak close over your shirt collar, and within moments you are being dragged back up over the edge of the aerie. Shaking in relief, you collapse to the bottom of the nest.

"Now, here's your saddlebags." Leo drops them down to you.

Taking a deep breath and trying to stop trembling, you sit up and pretend to search through them.

"Ah," you say shakily, "I—I guess I've lost it. Never mind. I've found something much more important up here."

"Been snooping, have you?" Leo asks, his eyes glinting dangerously in the moonlight.

"N-no," you stammer. "I—I just happened to have the Red Crystal out, testing it. When I looked through it, I found this!"

Please turn to page 117.

I'm a terrible liar, you think. I better make a dash for it.

"Come on, horse," you mutter.

Yelling wildly, you dig your heels into the horse's flanks. The startled animal leaps forward. Desperately you cling to his mane.

"Stop in the name of the king!" shouts the guard. He goads his horse into a gallop.

It's going to be close, you think, heading for the open countryside. The guard was in front of you, and now he's riding at an angle, hoping to cut you off.

If you can get past him, you've got it made! He can never hope to keep up with this horse. The ground flies underneath you. Wind rushes past, blowing back your hair.

But the guard is getting closer and closer. If you beat him, it's only going to be by a nose. You see the guard stretch out his hand, grasping for your horse's reins!

Frantically you take your foot from the stirrup and kick at the guard as you gallop past. You feel your boot connect with something solid, and you hear the guard howl in pain.

Then the guard is gone. Glancing back over your shoulder, you see him hunched over his horse's neck, clutching his arm.

Elated with your victory, you ride on to King's Mountain.

Please turn to page 14.

You can't think of the name! Bitterly you wish you'd paid closer attention to that letter! The screeching sound is so close now it's deafening. In the darkness you hear the rushing of wings.

Then you remember the Red Crystal. "It won't hurt me as long as I've got the crystal!" You raise your hand holding the crystal in the air—only to see to your horror that the crystal is gone!

Your horse bolts away in panic, throwing you to the ground as it gallops back down the trail. You scramble for cover, hoping to find safety—but your efforts are in vain.

Suddenly there is a flurry of feathers right above you. You feel sharp claws sink into your back, and you know it is—

THE END

A wizard wouldn't pick something obvious like a real window; he'd pick the least obvious thing. You turn to the shadow of the window on the wall, raise the Red Crystal, and as it begins to glow, look through it.

❖ *Quickly turn to page 135 and see if you've chosen the right window.*

Behind you, you hear the door to the torture chamber burst open. Andria screams briefly as guardsmen seize her.

Still holding the Red Crystal up to your eye, you reach through the wall and grasp the Blue Crystal. King Goswar must have planned a magical spell that made a connection directly between this wall and the place where the Blue Crystal was kept, a sort of magical shortcut to the gem if it was badly needed.

The Blue Crystal feels cool and heavy in your hand. Pulling it out of the wall, you lower the Red Crystal and turn to face the guards.

They are standing staring at you, awestruck. They have just seen you reach through a solid stone wall and pull out a glowing blue gem. They shuffle backwards, trying to get away from you as quickly as possible.

"He's a sorcerer!" one of the guards cries. "He's probably gonna blow us to kingdom come!"

You smile, dropping the two crystals in your pockets. On impulse, you raise your hands and spread your fingers, palms down, thumbs touch-

ing. Aiming them at the guards, you say with a grin, "I hope you have a nice journey."

As the horrified guards watch you, you say your spell and your hands burst into flames. As one, the guards roar with terror and stampede out of the room to safety.

The flames on your hands suddenly sputter and go out. "Drat," you remark, wiping your sooty fingers on your clothes. "I got the Burning Hands spell wrong again."

"I don't think it matters," Andria says, coming out from behind a rack, her eyes wide. "I never saw anyone run away so fast in all my life."

"I didn't run," says a deep, all-too-familiar voice. "In fact, I was rather amused."

King Parthon enters the room, the Yellow Crystal on his chain necklace glowing brightly. Panicked by his sudden appearance, you reach into your pockets and pull the two crystals out.

"Give it up, Parthon," you say. "Two crystals to one is a bad bet."

Parthon reaches down and picks up an iron poker as he walks toward you. "You can't fight well with a crystal, Garik," he says as he raises the poker to strike you.

"Garik!" Andria shrieks. "Use the Blue Crystal!"

You raise the blue gem and, concentrating fiercely, aim it at the king. The Blue Crystal pulses in your hand like a heart beating. Parthon stops, his face filling with fear.

Suddenly the Yellow Crystal's light dims. A

stream of energy pours across the air between the blue and yellow crystals, and other streams of energy link the crystals with the red one in your other hand.

Parthon is paralyzed where he stands. Keeping the Blue Crystal aimed at him, you walk over to him and take the yellow stone from around his neck. Then you lower the Blue Crystal.

Parthon falls to the floor, unconscious.

Andria rushes over and throws her arms around you. "The riddle of the griffon is fulfilled!" she shouts. "The Blue Crystal has defeated the yellow, and the Red Crystal will rule!"

"Does this mean that we've won?" you ask dazedly.

Andria pulls away from you for a moment. "Grandpa said you were an airhead," she whispers. "You really are slow, but I don't care. Yes, Garik, it means you have won. You are the new king."

And indeed, you are.

THE END

Looking around, you find yourself in a narrow corridor tunneled out of the rock of the mountain. You and Leo walk down the passageway, going deeper and deeper into the caverns. The griffon is forced to duck his head to avoid bumping into the low ceiling.

Soon you notice on the right hand side of the corridor a small wooden door. Above it you see a stone carving of a griffon!

"Look there!" you cry, clutching Leo's feathers in excitement.

"Watch the feathers! That hurts!" the griffon snaps irritably. "I see it, I see it."

You step over to the door to give the carving a closer inspection.

"Not a bad likeness," Leo says, examining it with pretended indifference, as he puffs up his feathers in pride. "Caught my good side."

"Yes, yes, but what does it mean?" you ask impatiently. This dark and dismal corridor is beginning to make you nervous. "Or did Goswar put your picture up just to scare away the rats?"

"You're the one with the Crystal of Divination," Leo growls. "I suggest you look through it. Goswar put a lot of traps in this place to keep out unwanted visitors. But I used to bring Simon up here, and he'd pass through safely. The two had some sort of warning system devised using the Red Crystal, I think."

"You don't remember what it was?"

Leo shakes his head, but you can see his eyes gleam brightly in the torchlight.

"You have a very selective memory!" you accuse him, thinking that he can be pretty uncooperative when he wants to be.

The griffon simply shrugs his winged shoulders.

Figuring you have no other choice, you bring out the box containing the Red Crystal. Removing the jewel, you hold it up to your eyes and stare through it at the carving of the griffon.

❖ *Look through your Red Crystal at the picture on page 10 to examine the carving. Then return here and continue reading.*

"Yes, you're right," you say. "The Red Crystal does reveal a warning. I can see bars like those on a jail cell." You feel a surge of excitement. "It must be a warning to keep out unwanted people! Maybe this is the treasure room!"

"Or maybe those bars keep something in," Leo adds ominously.

1) If you think this might be the way into the treasure room, turn to page 113.

2) If you decide Leo's right—that this is a trap, turn to page 110.

You know what would happen if you surrendered. Parthon would take all three crystals and rule Avarlaine with a tyrant's fist, while you'd probably join your father in the torture chambers. You *must* fight.

You pull away from Andria and step out into the pillared corridor. Parthon stands about twenty feet away, the yellow Crystal of Rulership swinging from his necklace.

Pretending to be under the Yellow Crystal's influence, you make your face blank and slowly kneel in the hallway, facing Parthon. A smile plays over the king's face as he walks toward you.

"Looks as if your Blue Crystal isn't much good against my Yellow Crystal," Parthon says with a cold grin. "Too bad. You won't get a second chance from me."

"I won't need one!" you exclaim, raising the Blue Crystal and aiming it directly at Parthon. You concentrate hard. Whatever this crystal can do, it needs to do it *now!*

Parthon's smile vanishes. "What did you say?" he roars, enraged.

He doesn't get a second chance to hear it. The Blue Crystal, already as bright as a torchlight, suddenly glows so brightly that you are blinded by its radiance. You turn your head away, eyes shut, keeping the crystal aimed at Parthon.

Even with your eyes closed, you can feel energy pouring out of the Crystal of Change. At the same time, energy seems to be flowing back into it in a way you cannot describe.

You peek for a moment. Jagged sparks of lightning twist and coil between the two crystals. Parthon is frozen in mid-stride, a look of shock, anger, and fear on his face.

Abruptly the blue Crystal of Change falls silent. The light of the Yellow Crystal is reduced to a faint flow. Parthon sways on his feet, then falls forward on his face with a loud thump.

You crawl forward, still half blinded by the light, and reach out for the king.

"Garik?" Andria calls from her hiding place among the pillars. "Garik, what's happening?"

"The Blue Crystal got him," you say simply. "It-it protected me while it drained his energy. And you know what?" you add, not recognizing your own voice.

"What?"

"I think I've just become the new king." As you get to your feet, you remember something Parthon said. "Come on! We have to get my father out of prison!"

Lots of things happen in the next few days. You get your father out of prison, Parthon's mercenaries are thrown out of Avarlaine, and the few wizards left in the kingdom are brought back to the palace. You have to use all three of the Rainbow Crystals to accomplish these things.

It takes a full week before anyone has the time to formally crown you King of Avarlaine. Simon himself sets the crown on your head, as your father, mother, and Andria (who has collected

ten gold pieces from her grandfather) look on proudly.

A tremendous roar of approval goes up from the thousands of people gathered in the city square watching your coronation. Simon sighs and shakes his head as he looks you over.

"Never thought you'd make it, kid," he mutters. "You looked like a complete airhead to me."

"Well, I wasn't." You find it hard to sound irritable while smiling and waving at the crowd in a regal fashion. "I'm probably not the most experienced king there's ever been, but I'll certainly try harder than anyone ever has."

Simon snorts and shakes his head again. "I know you will. I've given you a hard time, but I think you'll be one of the best rulers we've ever had. Go for it, your Majesty."

You smile at the old man, and he smiles back. Avarlaine is free.

THE END

You hesitate, fingers closed around the Red Crystal in your pocket. "Well, maybe we should check down the hall to be sure no one's after us." You pull your hand from your pocket and put your fingers together to make the Burning Hands spell, just in case.

Andria and you walk side by side down the corridor away from the double doors. Andria's dagger lights your way.

"I don't see that anyone's been following us after all," Andria says after a few minutes. "I guess I was just imagining that I heard something."

"That's good," you sigh. "At least we don't have to worry about meeting Ki—"

A soft whisper of movement comes from behind you. You and Andria turn swiftly, eyes wide, blood cold.

The last thing you are conscious of seeing is a giant, lynxlike creature flying toward you at enormous speed. Open jaws reveal two-inch ivory fangs. Giant paws with claws equally long and razor-sharp are spread out before it, ready to capture its prey.

Kitty.

THE END

"But what does the riddle mean?" you ask.

Simon shrugs. "I *do* know that it has to do with the murder of King Goswar."

You nod solemnly. The dreadful event he speaks of happened only two years ago and was the blackest day in the history of Avarlaine.

"I was there, in the castle," Simon recalls, "the day Parthon killed Goswar and seized control of the kingdom."

You stare at the old man in astonishment.

"Yes, you look amazed, Garik. But I was one of the most powerful people in the kingdom. I was Goswar's dearest friend!"

Simon's face turns grave. "Goswar knew Parthon was slowly gaining control. He lived to regret his decision to make Parthon general of the army, giving him the power and the funds to hire mercenaries. He even gave him the Yellow Crystal as a symbol of authority, not realizing at the time that Parthon was using it to charm people into obeying him.

"But Goswar wasn't just a king. He was a wizard!" you cry. "Why didn't he do something?"

"He did," the old man replies. He sighs heavily under the weight of the painful memory.

"Parthon and his troops rushed into the throne room that night. Parthon used the magic of the Yellow Crystal to charm Goswar, preventing the king from casting a spell that would stop the attack. As court magician, I held the Red Crystal of Divination, but before I could act, Parthon plunged a knife into my poor king's body. I

ran to Goswar's side, but he died in my arms. The last words he said were "Blue Crystal" and "Riddle of the Griffon."

The old man falls silent. You burn with anger, thinking of Parthon's evil deed.

"What was the Blue Crystal?" you ask.

Simon shakes his head. "That I don't know. I knew only that Goswar created it to stop Parthon. And the parchment bearing the riddle of the griffon appeared later—mysteriously."

"Where is the Blue Crystal?" you persist.

"The Blue Crystal is probably in Goswar's Caverns, hidden deep within King's Mountain. That was where Goswar magically forged the other two crystals. The way was guarded by a griffon. Only Goswar could tame the beast. Even Parthon was frightened of it. That is why the beast still has his nest there today, guarding the way into the caverns."

"And that's why Parthon hasn't been able to get to the fortune in jewels and gold said to lie within the mountain!" you add excitedly.

Simon nods in agreement. "Many of Parthon's men lost their lives, torn apart by that griffon. Finally Parthon dared send no more to attack the beast. He feared his troops would rebel.

"Now he sits in idleness, seething with the knowledge that a fortune goes untouched. And, of course, he fears someone else will find the Blue Crystal before he does."

"Then he knows of it?"

"He suspects—he's always had spies, you

know. But he doesn't know how to get to it."

"How did you escape?" you ask, finding it hard to believe this old man was involved in so much danger and intrigue.

"I was able to teleport myself from the throne room. I came here to hide, creating this magical forest around me. You entered only because I wanted you to enter. If you had been one of Parthon's guards, you would never have lived to find my house."

Shuddering, you glance around you quickly, half-expecting to see some loathsome beast peering in the window.

Simon sighs. "But, even as I escaped, I made myself a prisoner. It takes all my skill to maintain this magical forest. If I were to leave it, I would fall an easy victim to Parthon. That is why I must depend on another to undertake this quest and find the Blue Crystal."

"But why me?" you wonder aloud.

"Because you are young, and you have the stamina to undertake this rigorous quest," Simon explains. "But I don't know if you're 'king' material," he adds slyly.

Your heart skips a beat. "Did you say 'king?'"

"Yes, it's a possibility—if you can locate the Blue Crystal. But that's up to you," Simon replies, rising suddenly.

"B-but—b-but," you stutter. "What about the griffon . . . and the riddle?"

"For the moment you know as much as I do. You'll have to find the rest of the answers your-

self. Now, you've overstayed your welcome."

"Wait a minute!" you shout, surprised by his sudden brusqueness. "What about the Red Crystal?"

"Take it with you. It will help you on your quest." Simon grins at you and adds, "But know that it will come back to me safely—whether or not you do!

"Now be on your way—to your festival or to the quest. It makes little difference to me."

Your head is reeling with all the information you've just received. The quest certainly promises adventure and excitement, but also danger.

The dance will be starting soon. You hate to miss it—the biggest celebration of the year. Plus it's your birthday! Your friends were planning something special.

You tuck the box containing the Red Crystal under your arm, preparing to leave.

"By the way," Simon adds. "If you leave on the quest now, I have a letter for you."

1) If you want to postpone the quest until after the festival, walk out the door and turn to page 103.

2) If you can't wait to start the quest, take the letter Simon is offering you, head out the door, and turn to page 32.

Shaking with terror, you have to force yourself to slide your foot forward. Only the sound of Parthon's voice from outside on the mountain drives you on.

Anything's better than being captured by that butcher! you think. Besides, I *must* trust the Red Crystal!

Fearfully and half-expecting your foot to step off into nothing, you are overwhelmed with relief when you feel something solid beneath you!

"There *is* a stair!" you cry.

Moving forward, you stand on a ledge. When you step on it, the stairs materialize out of the darkness.

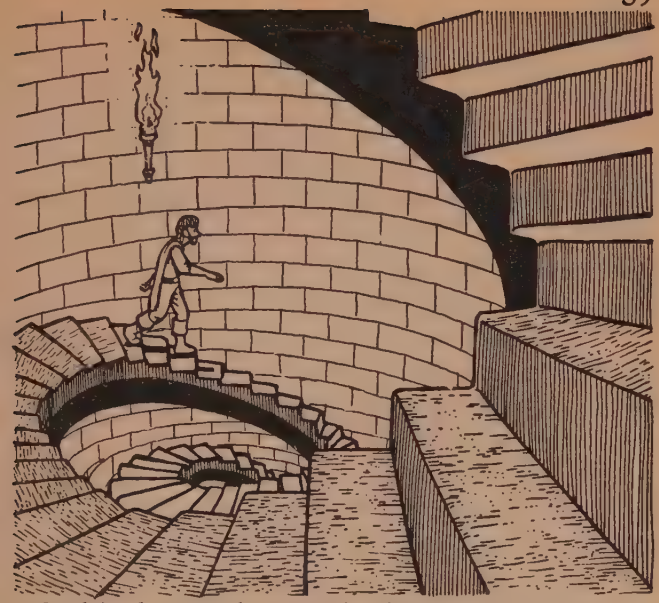
Behind you, Parthon shouts, "Get out of the way, you morons! Give this stupid creature room to land. . . . All right, now get in there after that griffon and the young man with him!"

You hear the sound of boots clattering against the stone floor.

"Well, don't just stand there! Get moving!" Shoving you roughly aside, Leo spreads his wings and soars into the air. His feet never touch the staircase!

"Hey!" you call, running down the winding stairs after him. "I forgot you could fly! You made me walk out, knowing I could have fallen!"

Furious, you run and run. The stairs seem to go on forever. The sound of Parthon's men chasing you fades behind you. But you know they are still there. Maybe the stairs will disappear again, but you dare not count on it.



Suddenly you hear a thud and a "whoomph" and then lots of words in a language you assume is griffon.

"What is it?" you call.

"A wall!" comes a muffled voice. "Flew right into the— Get down here with that Red Crystal!"

You round a turn in the stairs and nearly run smack into the griffon, who is seated at the bottom, rubbing his beak with a claw.

Before him, you see another door with another griffon carved above it.

Keeping an eye on Leo, you take out the box, lift out the crystal, and hold it up.

Looking through it, you see . . .

❖ *Use your Red Crystal on page 138.*

You think of your father in Parthon's torture chambers and of how foolish it would be for you to try and defy a man who is a thousand times the fighter that you are. You are only a beginning magic-user. Parthon is a seasoned warrior, a merciless killer.

"Okay," you call, your voice cracking with fear. "Wait. I'm coming out."

Andria tries to hold you back, but you gently push her hands away from you. Stepping into the pillared hall, you face the yellow light from Parthon's crystal.

The tyrant king stares at the blue Crystal of Change without expression. The Crystal of Rulership shines like a cold sun from his necklace.

"Put that thing down, boy, for your father's sake and for your own," Parthon orders. His dark eyes hold no hope of compromise.

You put the Blue Crystal down on the ground and back away from it.

Almost immediately, you feel the power of the yellow Crystal of Rulership seep into your soul and steal away your will.

Parthon walks forward and claims the Crystal of Change and your Crystal of Divination.

"Thanks, boy," Parthon offers with a shark's cold smile. "Thanks a lot."

THE END

I'm not going to take a chance on turning this creature unfriendly, you think. It's best to be honest. I'll get myself in less trouble that way.

"There's home," Leo says proudly.

Looking ahead over the griffon's wing, you see an aerie perched on a ledge on the side of the mountain. From here it looks like a huge nest of straw. Leo lands in the middle, and you slide off his back.

Looking around, you gasp! You've never seen or imagined such wealth! The bright moonlight shines on jewels, gold, and all sorts of precious things scattered around carelessly.

Parthon must have spent a fortune trying to bribe the griffon, not to mention risking the lives of his men. What am I doing here? you think. He'll stomp on me as if I were an ant!

Trying to get your mind off Parthon, you continue looking around. You peer over the edge of the ledge, then feel your heart skip a beat. It's a sheer drop of hundreds of feet! You back away and turn around. Behind you is the mountain wall, and in the mountain you see a huge iron door!

"That must be the way into Goswar's Caverns!" you cry in excitement.

"It is," Leo growls. "And *no* one gets through that door now that Goswar is dead. I am the guardian. I have always been the guardian. The only way up here is the way you came, in fact. On my back. That's the way I always brought Goswar."

"How do you open the door?" you ask.

"I haven't the slightest idea!" Leo snaps. "If I knew, do you think I'd be camped out here on this rock? I'd be sitting on Parthon's throne, and *he'd* be lunch!"

Swallowing, you glance around. "Uh, do you mind if I take a look through this stuff, using the Red Crystal?" you ask. "Simon wouldn't have sent me to you if he didn't think you could provide some clue as to how I could get inside."

"I?" Leo repeats, his eyes flaring and the feathers rising on the top of his head.

"We!" you gasp. "I mean *we*, of course."

"That's better!" Leo sniffs. "Be my guest."

"Thank you," you say, exasperated but polite. Reaching in your pocket, you bring out the box, lift the lid, and remove the Red Crystal. The griffon's eyes seem to flame in the moonlight at sight of the gem.

"I could hold that for you," Leo offers, too helpfully. "It looks heavy."

"I can manage," you mutter, glaring at the griffon. "Now, back up a bit. Hmmmm. Move your foot. Thanks. Well." You sigh. "I don't see—wait a minute!"

❖ *Look at the picture on page 142 with your Red Crystal, then turn to page 117.*

You decide that Andria's probably not a spy. She seems to know things that only you and the old wizard Simon would know. Parthon's spies might be good, but they aren't THAT good.

But you also decide that you need Andria like you need a hole in the head, and you tell her so in the same words.

"Grandpa said you'd probably get yourself killed before you'd ever make it to the Blue Crystal," Andria snarls, digging something out of her pocket. "I hope this time he's wrong, but only because I bet him you'd make it, and I don't want to lose ten gold pieces."

She shoves a crumpled piece of paper at you. "If you're not going to let me show you the way, you may as well head right up King's Mountain and meet the griffon face-to-face. This is a letter with the monster's name on it. This thing might save your stupid life."

"I don't need—"

"You DO!" Andria shouts at you. She pauses to get control of herself. "You're a jerk, but if you can get past the griffon, I might even forgive you for being one. Just trust me to know what I'm doing!"

Silence falls between you, and you both stare at your feet for a moment.

"You'll need some help finding the right path up the mountain," Andria says in a quiet voice. "I'll show you the way. Once you're on the mountain, you can use the Red Crystal to find the griffon's nest."

You look into her face. She looks back at you, then drops her eyes again.

"Listen," she says. "I'm sorry I blew up, but Parthon had my parents killed, and I really wanted to go on this mission with you to get back at him for it. I'll just hope you can do it for me. I wish you luck, 'cause you're gonna need all the luck you can get just to live past the first few seconds when that griffon sees you."

With that, she leads you out of the alley and to the edge of the city, your head whirling with all that's happened in the last few minutes. But inside, you feel your determination building.

"I'll get Parthon," you promise her in a low voice. "I'll be back with the Blue Crystal before dawn tomorrow."

Andria looks up and studies your face intently. Then her eyes begin to twinkle. "I hope so. I still don't want to lose ten gold pieces, especially to Grandpa."

Moments later, you're heading up the mountain road. When you think you're far enough from the city, you stop in a secluded spot to read the letter Andria gave you.

Please turn to page 32.

"Hey, Garik." One of your friends sees the box in your hands and leans close, intrigued. "What's in the box?"

You hesitate to reveal the Red Crystal of Divination. If someone saw you and reported you to the king, you might be jailed—or worse!

"Uh, just some stuff," you say vaguely, putting the box back in your pocket. You start away quickly. "I'll see you guys later."

"Where are you going?" your friends call, but you hurry down the street.

"Garik!" you hear someone calling behind you. The voice is a girl's, someone not familiar to you. You stop and turn, impatient at being held up.

THUMP! The girl was following you so closely that she runs right into you. "Oh, I'm sorry!" she exclaims, stepping back. Curls of long brown hair bounce on the shoulders of her tunic as she giggles. "You *are* Garik, aren't you?"

Whoever this girl is, she's cute, but you don't have time to talk. "I don't mean to be rude," you tell her, "but I'm in a hurry to go and . . . ah, go do something."

"I know what that will be," the girl says. "My grandfather, Simon, sent me to help y—"

"SHHH!" you hiss at her. Looking around, you take her aside away from passersby.

"What are you doing?" you whisper angrily, though conscious of sounding like your father. "You must be brain-damaged to say that name in public! And what do you mean, you know what I'm doing?"

"My grandfather sent me along to help you," she answers, shaking off your grip. "My name is Andria. I'm good at finding things, like traps and spies and stuff like that." Then she glares at you as she adds, "Grandpa didn't say you were a jerk."

"Look, I'm NOT a jerk, and I don't need your help!" you whisper back.

"I can get you into the castle and into old King Goswar's Caverns," Andria says, her green eyes flashing defiantly.

You hesitate. "How?"

Andria snaps her fingers. "Easy as that. Just take me with you. I know more tricks to get into places than you can imagine."

She may be cute, but she's irritating, too. You debate whether or not to trust her. After all, she might be a spy for Parthon.

Then again, if she's really Simon's granddaughter, maybe she could be of some help after all. . . .

1) You had already decided to go alone earlier, and you're not changing your mind now. Turn to page 64

2) You think it might not be a bad idea to have Andria's help on the quest. Turn to page 97.

You reach down and flip open the small chest that radiates magic. A soft glow spills out from the box. But your cry of joy freezes in your throat.

The crystal inside the box is *green.*

As you stare in surprise at the crystal, you suddenly feel the urge to reach down and grasp it. You are vaguely aware of someone shouting a warning to you, someone who's name you cannot remember. I must have picked the wrong box, you think, just before you touch the crystal—

—and green light fills your vision, brilliant green, infinite, crystaline, eternal green. You fall head over heels, weightless in a green universe.

You are floating in the green crystal.

"It was a trap after all," you say aloud. For some reason, you feel calm and sleepy. Perhaps the green crystal was designed to capture treasure hunters who made the foolish mistake of going for the obvious chest. A clever old man, King Goswar.

You made a mistake, but it doesn't matter. You are getting sleepier and sleepier. Your eyes droop, your limbs grow heavy, and the world turns green, green, green as you reach

THE END

You recall the words to Burning Hands, the only magic spell you know. You calmly stretch your arms, forming your hands into the required shape for the spell.

"Well, here goes nothing," you whisper to yourself. At the moment you call out the magic words, you raise your hands into the air.

A tremendous explosion knocks you to the floor, almost roasting you with heat and choking you with smoke. You must have spoken the wrong words to the spell.

Coughing and gasping for air, you get to your feet and run through the smoke-filled throne room. Guards are lying on the floor, coughing and rubbing their eyes. Not bad for a screw-up, you think with satisfaction.

Suddenly you run into someone in the smoke as you leave the throne room. The collision knocks you both down. As you try to scramble away, you see that you ran into a girl.

"Garik?" she cries, starting to cough. "Garik, come with me! Simon—"

Taking a wild chance, you grab the girl by the arm and steer her down a corridor at a dead run, until you find an open door. A quick peek shows the room to be empty, and you push her inside.

The girl is about your age, with long, curly, brown hair and green eyes. There's a fleeting resemblance to Simon.

"Who are you, and what do you want?" you demand.

"Hey, don't get tough with me," the girl says

angrily. "You were stupid enough to get caught and lose the Red Crystal, so I'm here to pull your irons out of the fire. Here's your crystal back." The girl takes the Red Crystal from her pocket and hands it to you.

"Grandpa told me to give it back to you, but I think you'll just lose it again," the girl adds. "By the way, my name's Andria, if you can remember that."

This girl might be an ally and the granddaughter of Simon, but she's very irritating, too. "You think you could handle this quest any better?" you growl.

"I *know* I could," she says. "But I'm not a magic-user, and you are, so you get to do the tough stuff. I'm just coming along to keep you alive."

The thump of heavy bootsteps echoes past the door, and you both fall silent. "So," you continue, "if you can do better, get us out of this place before we get killed."

"Done," Andria says easily. "Follow me."

The girl leads you through a back door in the room, then down a series of empty halls and twisting corridors.

You know you're lost, and you wonder why she isn't when she says, "I used to live in this castle with Grandpa before we got kicked out by Parthon. I know this place like the back of my hand. That's how I sneaked in past the guards."

Andria finally leads you into a room where a cheery fire is burning in a fireplace. A bearskin

rug graces the floor, and hunting tapestries cover the walls.

"This must be Parthon's trophy room," you remark, looking around.

"Grandpa told me there was a secret exit leading out of this room," Andria says as she starts searching the walls. "We've got to find it to get into the caverns of old King Goswar and get you to the Blue Crystal."

You look at Andria sharply. "I can't believe Simon told you about that. I thought it was supposed to be a secret."

"So I was eavesdropping," Andria says. "I can do all sorts of sneaky things—and I do if they help people. So stop talking and help me find that secret door to get us out of here!"

You suddenly think of the Red Crystal you hold in your hand. Perhaps it would help you locate a way out of the room.

Holding the Crystal of Divination up to your eyes, you scan the room carefully.

❖ *Can you find a way out of the room by using your Red Crystal on page 9?*

"I found *two* secret doors!" you exclaim, pointing to the fireplace. "One's in the fireplace itself and one's under the bearskin rug!"

"Easy one first," Andria says quickly, flipping the bearskin rug aside and reaching for the handle on the trap door. "Good thing you thought of using the crystal."

"It was nothing," you say coolly, feeling good about yourself. "I just . . . oops."

Andria flips open the trap door and steps back with a gasp. Beneath the trap door is a pit that seems to have no bottom.

"I guess the fireplace door is the one we want," you say weakly.

It takes several minutes to put out the fire and get the secret door open. Crawling over the warm ashes, you enter a long, narrow tunnel that descends into the earth.

"We're in Goswar's Caverns now," Andria says, pulling out a dagger.

You start to say, "Oh, no, you don't—" when she whispers a word, and the dagger lights up, glowing softly like a torch.

Both of you freeze instantly. Lying in the corridor ahead of you is the skeleton of a man wearing the armor of one of Parthon's guards. You bend over the body to check it over carefully. What clothing remains has been ripped to shreds.

"Something big got this guy," you finally say weakly. You move away, trying to control your trembling. "Maybe it was a mountain lion or something."

Andria looks at the body with wide eyes. "Do you think the big kitty is still around?"

You see her fear and try to give her confidence, even though you don't know what she's talking about. "You shouldn't be bothered by a kitty-cat. You said you could handle anything."

"Very funny," Andria says grimly.

The two of you set off through the tunnels and eventually come to a staircase that leads up. "Let's hope we can find that Blue Crystal and do something about Parthon," you mutter.

"Let's also hope Parthon doesn't find out where we've gone and decide to do something about us," Andria says.

You really wish she hadn't said that.

Please turn to page 34.

"I can't remember the name! But I think I can remember one of my magic spells. Burning Hands! I can't use it against the griffon. The creature's far too powerful. But I might be able to—"

Hurriedly you spread the letter out on the ground. You can hear the screeching sound get closer and closer. Holding your hands out flat with your fingers fanned out and your thumbs touching, you quickly recite the words to the spell.

It works! A bright flare of fire springs from your hands, shooting straight out in front of you.

It won't last long, you know. And now the griffon can see you quite clearly. You hear it screech in anticipation of the kill. Kneeling to read the letter, your eyes go to the postscripts at the bottom of the page.

> You may now turn back to page 32 to read the postscripts and learn the griffon's name. When you know it, turn to page 94.

The last thing you need is to fight someone with a battle-axe. A dwarf may be shorter than you, but *this* dwarf looks mighty strong. You consider using your Burning Hands spell but discard it as too weak.

The only thing left to do is talk.

"Wait a minute!" you say. "We're not trying to attack you or anything. Calm down!"

"Then what are you two doin' here?" he growls.

You hesitate, unsure of how much of the truth to tell him. "We were just exploring these tunnels," you say at last.

"You're some of that rat Parthon's spies, that's what you are!" the dwarf interrupts, raising his axe menacingly.

Suddenly you know only the truth will do. "We're looking for the Blue Crystal so we can stop Parthon from destroying this kingdom!" you shout. The dwarf's eyes grow large as you speak, and he lowers his axe a little.

"It's true!" Andria says urgently from behind you. "My grandfather is Simon the Mage, and this is Garik, a magic-user come to find the Blue Crystal of King Goswar."

"We're the good guys!" you add.

The dwarf's eyes seem to mist over. "Well," he says reluctantly, "maybe you are good guys and maybe you aren't." But he lets his axe fall as he continues.

"I am Thordain, old Goswar's servant. I've been down here since Goswar died, making sure

none of that rat Parthon's spies get into these tunnels."

"Can you help us find the Blue Crystal?"

"Blue Crystal, huh?" Thordain pauses and then nods his shaggy head. "Goswar told me he made the Blue Crystal to break the power of the yellow if a rat got hold of it. Goswar told me to keep the Blue Crystal out of the wrong hands. I guess you're all right."

You relax, feeling the sweat run down your face. "Thank you," you mumble.

The dwarf motions for you to follow him. "If this'll get rid o' the rat, I'm all for it."

You and Andria follow the dwarf through twisting tunnels until Thordain stops and points the way up a spiral staircase. "Just follow these steps and you'll go right to the treasure room; you can't miss it. Watch out for the kitty, though."

You come to a stop, one foot on the first step. "Kitty?"

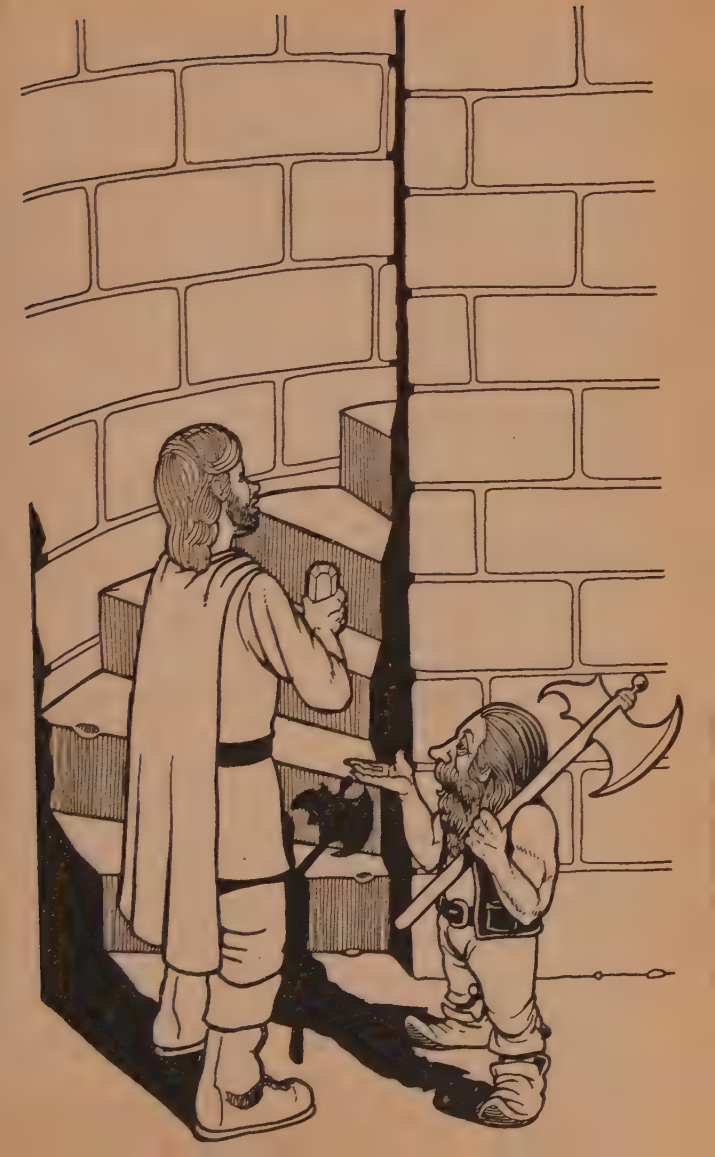
"Goswar put critters all around, but Kitty was magicked to stay upstairs. But watch yourselves—Kitty's not real tame."

On that thought, Thordain walks away.

"Kitty?" you and Andria exclaim in unison.

Andria, lighting the way, starts up the stairs. You follow close at her heels.

Please turn to page 34.



Leo Aquila isn't evil. He may be a little too greedy, and you have no idea what kind of king a griffon might make. But, after all, Goswar trusted him, so he really couldn't be too bad.

"Here, Leo!" you shout desperately. Hoping you're doing the right thing, you throw the box containing the Red Crystal to the griffon. Leo snatches the box in his beak and flies into the darkness above where you know the stairs to be.

"Keep 'em busy, kid!" you think you hear Leo mumble through the box in his beak.

"Yeah," you murmur unhappily. Then you mutter to yourself, "Simon probably won't be surprised that I gave away the Red Crystal."

Just then, the guards grab you. Binding your hands tightly behind you, they force you to kneel down on the stone floor.

"Hail, Parthon!" they call as the evil general comes into view.

Looking up at his sneering face, you are filled with loathing.

"Bow to your betters, boy!" One of the guards punches you in the back of the neck. Your head hits the stone floor and pain fills your skull. Still, you raise your gaze to stare defiantly and with hatred into Parthon's squinty eyes.

The guard seems ready to hit you again, and you brace yourself for the blow.

But Parthon smiles. "No, no," he says in a silky smooth voice. "Let the boy look upon me and see how truly great and powerful I am."

Parthon raises the Yellow Crystal that he wears

around his neck. "Stare into the crystal, lad, and you will soon come to believe in me. You will tell me everything I want to know!"

"NO!" You scream, trying to avoid looking into the crystal. But the guard grabs you by the hair and holds your head, forcing you to stare right at the Yellow Crystal. You close your eyes, but the power seems to burn right through your eyelids.

The crystal begins to sparkle and glitter. You see Parthon through its yellow haze, and suddenly you recognize that he is misunderstood, that he is a truly wonderful person. He's the best thing that ever happened to the kingdom

You know you're slipping under his spell. . . .

The scream of an eagle splits the air. Parthon looks up in alarm, breaking the spell. You wrench your eyes from the Yellow Crystal and look up to see Leo Aquila burst through the door behind you. In his beak, he holds both the Blue Crystal and the Red!

Parthon turns pale with rage! "Kill that wretched beast!" he yells.

Both of the guards draw their swords and lunge toward the griffon. Leo Aquila fights one with his razor-sharp talons, but he cannot use his slashing beak to attack because it holds the crystals. The second guard creeps up on him.

"I've got to help him!" you think.

Even though your hands are tied behind your back, you hurl yourself forward, hitting the guard squarely in the stomach with your head.

You hear the breath explode from his body, and the two of you tumble down in a heap on the floor.

"Grab the Red Crystal, kid!" you hear Leo mumble.

With a slash of his talons, the griffon easily cuts through your bonds as you struggle to your feet. You grab the Red Crystal from the griffon's beak.

Please turn to page 85.

"I can't give up the Red Crystal!" you yell, clutching it to your chest.

"Fool!" Leo Aquila snarls. "Well, remember, Parthon can't harm you, as long as you've got the crystal. Which won't be long. The Yellow Crystal is a crystal of charming. You'll hand him the Red Crystal without hesitation. Farewell, kid."

"Leo, wait!" you cry, but it's too late. Already the guards are in the hall. Drawing their swords, they back up in fear at the sight of the griffon.

But Leo simply flies past them, slashing at them threateningly with his beak as he goes.

You hear the griffon greet King Parthon. "What wonderful treasure have you brought me today? I see you're flying wyverns now. Wonderful! Now you can bring me my treasure in person instead of sending those foul-tasting guards."

"Do you know how to reach the Blue Crystal?" You hear Parthon's voice call to the griffon.

You fail to hear Leo Aquila's answer because two guards grab you. Binding your hands behind you, they drag you down the corridor. You see Leo and the king deep in conversation.

"Get the Red Crystal away from him," the griffon says, pointing at you. "And bring it back here. Maybe we can work out a deal."

"Excellent idea!" Parthon says, grinning. Sitting down on a throne that magically appears behind him, he holds up the Yellow Crystal.

"Look at the pretty rock, kid," Parthon says.

You try to avoid it, but one of the guards grabs you by the back of the head and forces you to stare

straight into the depths of the Yellow Crystal.

It's as if a cloud lifts from your soul. Suddenly Parthon is revealed as the most wonderful man in the world. You know you'd do anything for this great ruler. When he asks you for the Red Crystal, you give it to him gladly, pleased to make such a good man happy.

THE END

Frantically you dash down the corridor, heading back for the open door. In your head, a desperate idea is forming.

Glancing over your shoulder, you see the troll is in bad condition, even for a troll. It looks sickly and undernourished. It must not have had anything to eat in two years—ever since Goswar shut up the mountain.

Running faster and faster, you see the welcome sight of moonlight streaming through the open door. Shuddering, you think what would have happened if you had shut the door!

As it is, you now have a way to get rid of this troll that is pounding along so close behind you that you can practically feel its breath on your neck!

Dashing through the door, you run into the griffon's aerie and—at the last possible moment—fling yourself face down into the bottom of the nest. As you hoped, the troll's forward momentum is enough to propel the creature right over the edge!

"Aighhhhhhh!" You hear it shriek all the way down the mountain.

Though shaken, you struggle to your feet. Picking up your torch, you stomp out some places where it caught the straw on fire when you dropped it. Then, relighting it, you walk back inside the mountain.

Please turn to page 92.

"Hold up the Red Crystal! Focus it on the yellow!" the griffon cries. "Remember the lines in the riddle, 'Ruby red reveals all things, Amber gold shall bear the crown, Azure blue may pull it down!' Hold up the Red Crystal!"

You do as Leo says. The moment light from the Red Crystal touches Parthon, you see him once more as the evil man he is. Then you hear the guards next to you gasp as they stagger to their feet, and you realize that they, too, see Parthon as an evil tyrant! The magic of the Blue Crystal has erased the power of the Yellow!

"Fight them!" Parthon orders his guards.

"No!" The guards refuse, throwing down their weapons.

"Keep the Red Crystal trained on him!" Leo orders.

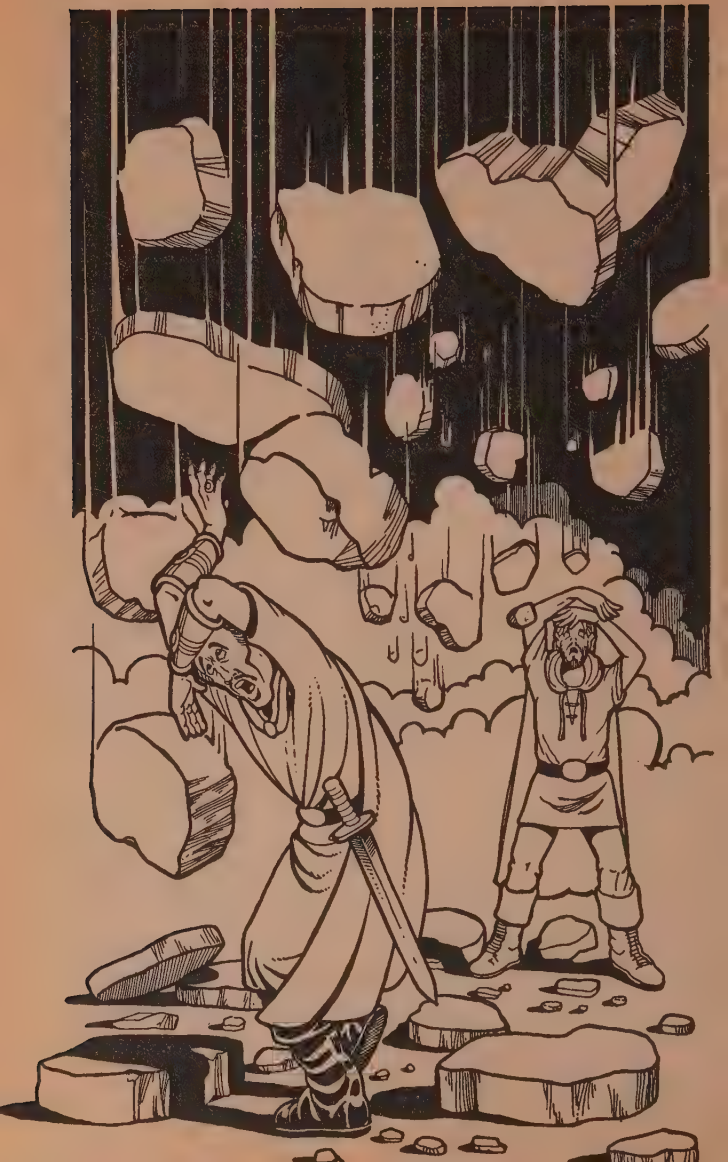
The griffon focuses the Blue Crystal on Parthon. You see the two shafts of bright light beaming from the magic crystals come together on the Yellow Crystal Parthon wears around his neck.

The Yellow Crystal begins to glow brightly as if growing hot.

"Aaaiiee!" Parthon yelps in pain. The Yellow Crystal seems to be on fire! The evil king tears the jewel from his neck and flings it to the floor. It glows brighter and brighter and—to your amazement—begins to grow larger and larger!

The guards begin backing away. Soon they are running for the mountain door.

"My jewel!" Parthon yells frantically, standing



near it. "I must get it back! It contains all my power!"

The glowing jewel grows until its light seems as bright as the sun.

"We've got to get out of here!" Leo shrieks. "Use the Red Crystal!"

"How?" you cry.

"You're the magician! Do something! This place is going to blow sky-high!" The griffon screams.

You don't know any teleport spells. This is no time for fancy language. You have one chance.

"Get us out of here!" you command the red gem, remembering just in time to grab hold of Leo's wing.

The walls begin to shake and crumble. Rocks fall around you. Then there is a brilliant red flash!

You find yourself in the ancient forest where this quest began. Blinking, you look around in surprise. Simon stands next to you, smiling at you.

"Well, Garik," he says, "you didn't do too badly. Look there."

He points to the mountain. As you watch, you suddenly see the entire side of the mountain above the castle explode in flames! "That's the end of Parthon," he says coolly.

"It's also the end of all the wealth in the treasury. And now we've got a griffon for king," you say gloomily. "I really botched it. Where is Leo Aquila anyway?"

"Oh, I sent him on to the Castle. He's got a lot of redecorating to do. By the way, he wants you to be his court magician."

"He does?" you say, flushing with pleasure.

"Yep. Tells me you saved his life. Old Leo Aquila might not be such a bad king after all. He holds the Blue Crystal, which has the power to take away all magic. You hold the Red Crystal, which gives the power of True Seeing. Between the two of you, you ought to manage pretty well."

"You mean you're giving me this to keep?" you ask, holding up the Red Crystal.

"You earned it, kid. By the way, have you met my granddaughter. Garik, this is Andria."

Turning, you see one of the prettiest girls you've ever seen smiling at you from the back of Simon's magical horse.

"Can I give you a lift to the castle?" she asks.

THE END

The menace in the dwarf's voice and battle-axe make you doubt if talk will help. But maybe a little magic will chase him off.

You spread your fingers in the Burning Hands "fan" pattern, aiming them right at the dwarf. Then you take a deep breath and say the words of the spell.

For a split second you wonder if you got the words right. Then your hands seem to burst into flames, and an arc of fire leaps from your fingertips and strikes the dwarf on his beard.

"AAAEEE!" the dwarf yells, slapping at his burning beard with a free hand. "You dang cursed treasure-hunters! You gotta be workin' for Parthon even if you *do* throw magic aroun'! I'm gonna whomp you a good 'un in a moment!"

You back away, horrified at the thought that you might have alienated a possible ally.

"We're not Parthon's mercenaries!" Andria yells. "Or at least I'm not!"

"Don't gimme that trash!" The enraged dwarf tugs at his singed beard. "You done burnt off my beard!" He then swings his battle-axe up and charges at you. "Eat cold steel, you spell-castin' pig-dog mercenary scum hirelin's of a rat king what don't take a bath ever!"

Before he can get halfway through his curses and oaths, you and Andria are running for your lives from the maddened dwarf. You hurtle through the dark corridors, finding no shelter or relief.

"If that dwarf doesn't stomp you, I swear I

will!" Andria yells at you. "He might have helped us, and instead you set his beard on fire! I could bash you for a week and not get tired! I'll make you pay for this!"

You say nothing. Between the dwarf's curses and Andria's threats, it looks as if your impulsiveness has brought you to

THE END

"Coward griffon!" you mutter as you stomp down the corridor, light flickering from the torch in your hand.

Walking past the door the troll came out, you quickly poke your head inside. You don't see anything except for a few well-gnawed bones.

Slamming the door shut, you continue down the corridor until you come to two double doors. You hold the torch high but see nothing above them—no carvings of a griffon.

"Must not be too important," you mutter to yourself, pushing gently on the doors. To your surprise, they open easily. Grasping the handles, you fling the doors open wide—

Leo's head pops out. "Is it gone yet?"

"Leo!" you gasp in surprise, nearly dropping the torch. "Yes, it's gone. It won't cause us anymore trouble—no thanks to you."

"I told you not to open that door," the griffon snorts. "Some of us are prudent."

At first you're so exasperated you can't talk. Then you manage to ask, "What's in there?"

"Wizard supplies," says Leo. "Nothing interesting. That's why it isn't locked. But you can check it out if you don't trust me."

"No," you mumble. You don't trust Leo, but you're certain that if there were anything in there, he'd have found it by now anyway. "Let's keep going."

Suddenly you hear . . .

Please turn to page 132.

"Leo . . . Leo Aquila!" you shout.

The screeching sound ceases abruptly with a startled "Huh?" from above you.

"Leo Aquila!" you repeat. Now that your eyes are accustomed to the darkness, you can see the outline of a huge shape hovering above you. It is the most frightening creature you've ever seen! An animal with the head, body, and wings of an eagle, but the hind feet and tail of a lion! "That's your name!"

"Who says?" the griffon demands as he lands.

"Simon!" you cry, getting up off the ground.

"Drat!" mutters the griffon, snapping his beak. "I suppose this means I can't rip your arms from their sockets?" he asks wistfully.

"Certainly not!" you say.

"Or bite off your head and devour you slowly, inch by inch!"

Starting to feel rather sick, you snap irritably, "Of course not! The runes said that if I knew your name I could pass safely. You *can't* go back on your word!"

"Not if you're going to be such a poor sport!" Leo snarls. The griffon peers back down the trail. "I suppose you'd be miffed if I went after the horse?"

"It's Simon's horse," you tell him.

"Probably magic, then, not flesh and blood. Can't eat magic," Leo says gloomily. Settling his feathered wings, he eyes you suspiciously. "Well, what do you want? Why did old Simon send you?"

Seeing as you just met him, you don't feel ready to ask the griffon's help, so you hold up the crystal and say, "He gave me this."

Just as you raise the crystal, the moon glints off the jewel, making it sparkle and shimmer in your hand. The griffon's eyes open wide with interest, and he draws closer.

"The Crystal of Divination!" Leo says in awe. "So old Simon had it all this time!"

The griffon creeps closer to you still. Remembering Simon's warning—that the griffon wanted the crystal himself—you quickly drop it back into its box, shut the lid with a snap, and slip the box into your pocket.

"My, my. This does change things, doesn't it?" Leo says in a voice as smooth as silk. "Why don't you come up and visit my aerie? It's beautiful. I have all sorts of wonderful things. Maybe we could work a deal—a diamond necklace for your girl friend? An emerald crown for mom? Two emerald crowns? A ruby slipper? What did you say your name was?"

"I didn't," you mutter, not trusting the sudden change in the griffon's manner. "I'll go with you, but this is strictly business. I need your help."

"Certainly," says Leo eagerly. "But why discuss business in such uncomfortable surroundings? Climb on my back. I'll fly you up to my nest, and we can talk in comfort."

Though you're not crazy about relying on this creature for a ride, you figure he won't drop you if you still have the Red Crystal.

Agreeing, you climb onto the griffon's back. The creature spreads his huge wings and rises easily into the air. As you're flying up into the air, clinging tightly to the griffon's feathers, you wonder about this creature.

Leo Aquila's being awfully friendly all of a sudden. He wants the Crystal and you wonder why? What does he need it for?

Then it occurs to you. The griffon must not have been able to get into the mountain treasury either! Otherwise, why would Parthon try to bribe him if all that treasure was already at his disposal? The Red Crystal must have something to do with that!

You could poke around Leo's nest, if you could think of some way to get rid of him—even if you don't know what you're looking for. Or you could just come straight out and ask Leo for his help. Before you arrive you must make a decision!

1) You decide to try and get rid of the griffon and search his nest while he's gone. Turn to page 36.

2) You decide to tell Leo everything you know and hope he will help you. Turn to page 61.

You and Andria stare at each other for a few seconds. "Prove that you're Simon's granddaughter," you say flatly.

"He said he gave you—" Andria drops her voice and gives a nervous look around her, "—he gave you the Red Crystal. You're supposed to go find the blue one in the caverns behind the griffon's aerie. When I told him I knew how to get past the griffon, he told me to find you."

You sigh heavily. "Great. Did he tell you everything else, too?"

Andria's eyes take on a mocking look. "About you becoming king?" She snorts, suppressing a smile.

"Knock it off," you say flatly. "Okay, you can go with me. Let's get into that alley, there, and I'll show you the scroll."

Moments later, hidden from any watchers in the crowd, you unroll the parchment. Andria watches with interest as you take the Crystal of Divination out of its box and look through it at the faded runes, watching as they turn into words.

❖ *Turn to page 7 if you want to read again what the Red Crystal reveals.*

You read the words aloud several times, then fold the parchment and stuff it back into your pocket.

"So what does it mean?" Andria asks.

"I . . . well, it mentions the Blue Crystal, what-

ever that is. And it seems to say that the Blue Crystal will do away with the Yellow. And that three people are looking for the Blue Crystal." You shake your head, just as confused as when you started.

"You must be one of the people," Andria offers. "I think the king is the first one mentioned, and the second one . . ." She, too, shakes her head in confusion.

"Hey! Don't forget the griffon!" you say suddenly. "Maybe the griffon wants to get the crystals, too."

Andria makes a face. "If the griffon wants the crystals, maybe we should let him have them. He's killed thirty men so far, and none of King Parthon's troops will even go within a mile of him."

You try to envision what an enraged griffon would look like, dropping out of the sky at you. "Let's go to the castle," you whisper aloud.

Within the hour, you and Andria find yourselves walking up the long stone roadway to the castle of the kings of Avarlaine. By tradition, certain parts of the castle are opened to the public on the day of the harvest festival.

Once inside the castle, Andria demonstrates a surprising skill at avoiding the guardsmen there. Taking the lead, she hides behind columns, cuts through unused hallways, even forces you to hide in a closet with her to avoid being caught.

"I don't like this!" you whisper nervously, waiting in the closet as the boots of armed men thump

past. "What if we're caught in here? We'd be dead ducks, without a doubt!"

Andria whispers back, "Grandpa was right—you talk big, but you aren't very brave." She walks off.

You feel your ears and face redden, stung to the core, your mind jumping between wanting to abandon your quest and Andria and a desire to show her how wrong she is.

Andria finally leads you into a library and pulls the doors to it shut.

"I'm surprised you haven't asked why I know my way around here," she says, walking over to a large, wooden door with a large griffon carved upon it.

Still smarting from her comment on your bravery, you just shrug. But finally you ask, "Why *do* you know your way around here?"

"I lived with my grandfather in this castle when I was a little girl," she says, looking the door over carefully. "I know every nook and cranny of this place. When Parthon stole the throne, I was away visiting some relatives, and Grandpa didn't have to worry about rescuing me."

"What happened to your parents?" you ask, forgetting your anger.

Andria stops her examination of the door for a moment and looks into the distance. Then she shakes her head. "Parthon had them killed," she says without expression.

You can think of nothing to say. Andria backs away from the door.

"I can't open it," she says tiredly. "Once I overheard old King Goswar mumble about the Griffon Door leading to the caves, but this door is locked tight. I don't think I could even pick it."

"You're a thief," you say with the realization that you had really known it all along.

"And a good one," she replies, not looking at you. "Grandpa hates it, but I'm good at it, and that's that!" And you know she's had many arguments about that.

You study the Griffon Door, thinking of Andria's memory of King Goswar. Since he was a magician, maybe he did something magical to the Griffon Door. If so, perhaps the Red Crystal will show it.

Silently you pull the Crystal of Divination out of its box. Raising the gem to your eyes, you look the door over.

❖ *Turn to page 143 to see what the Red Crystal reveals.*

"What you need is a key," you say, lowering the crystal. You reach out for the griffon's claws, your fingers touching the invisible key clutched in them. You hold it out to Andria. "Here it is."

Andria stares at your seemingly empty fingers. "You're kidding," she says flatly.

"The key was right in front of us the whole time. But it's invisible. Take it."

Andria manages to take the key from you. She fingers it lightly, determining the shape, then fits

it into the lock on the door. The lock clicks, and the door swings open.

Beyond the door is a tunnel that quickly disappears into blackness as thick as night. A burned-out torch hangs from the wall above you, but you have no way to light it.

"Spooky, isn't it?" Andria whispers.

"I thought you were supposed to be brave," you say, not bothering to hide your smile.

Andria frowns but says, "Okay, so I asked for that one. Let's drop it and go exploring."

Andria reaches into her clothing and pulls forth a dagger, which she holds aloft as she whispers a word that you don't catch. The dagger blade shines with a soft light, revealing the rough-sided corridor ahead.

You walk along in the soft light, seeing nothing extraordinary until you reach the junction of three passages.

"Beats me," you say at last. "I have no idea which way to go from here. Got any ideas?"

Andria says, "Hmmmm, well—"

"You could leave," interrupts another voice, rich and deep. It echoes around you, full of menace. Then you see a short, muscular figure stalking toward you from the darkness of one of the tunnels.

"A dwarf!" Andria exclaims.

"Do tell," the heavily bearded dwarf rumbles. You see now that he carries a two-handed battle-axe that reflects the light as if it has just been sharpened.

"An' you must be one of them humans." The dwarf's step never slows—he's almost up to you. You must make a decision immediately:

1) Will you talk to the dwarf in the hope that he can help? Turn to page 75.

2) Or do you think you should attack him? Turn to page 90.

"The riddle has gone unsolved this long, so one more day won't matter. Besides, it will be dark soon," you mumble to yourself, glancing around at the rapidly darkening forest. "I'll take it home and let Father figure it out while I'm at the festival. I'll start this quest in the morning!"

Relieved to have that weight off your mind, you put the parchment along with the box into a pocket in your leather tunic. Then you run as fast as you can to get out of the old wizard's forest.

Once you're away from the spooky forest, you slow your pace and take a deep breath.

Now, if you have to go on a quest, you might as well take a spell with you. As a beginning conjurer, you can learn only one spell a day. You feel in your pockets for the sheets of paper bearing your spells.

A quick thumb through the papers produces the Burning Hands spell that your father taught you last month. It would make a good fire starter and might stop anyone from chasing you if you can give them a hot foot. You know that it isn't much of a spell, but it might wind up being your only form of protection on this quest.

You memorize the spell, repeating the words with a care that you usually don't take, and practice holding your hands out in the "fan" pattern required to cast the spell properly.

An hour later, you saunter into the city of Avarlaine. Colorful pennants fly from the rooftops, and citizens dressed in bright costumes crowd the streets. Despite the festive atmosphere,

the people seem subdued. Then you notice some of King Parthon's mercenaries wandering the streets, pushing aside the townspeople who aren't quick enough to get out of their way.

You step aside for a mercenary, and your lip curls back in a sneer. Several years before he seized power from King Goswar, Parthon hired more and more mercenaries, quietly reducing the number of local people in the military. "We're better off with experts guarding our country," Parthon had explained at the time.

In the end, though, it was Parthon who was better off. When Parthon killed King Goswar two years ago, the mercenaries were more than willing to support the man who paid them. No doubt Parthon's use of the Yellow Crystal of Rulership, with its power to charm, further ensured their loyalty to him.

"Clear the streets!" a man shouts over the noise of the crowd. He wears the red cape of a mercenary commander. "King Parthon is coming! Clear the streets for the king!"

With sullen looks the townspeople step back from the cobblestone street. The commander smiles grimly, knowing full well the hatred the citizens of Avarlaine have for their oppressive ruler. He continues on through the streets, calling his warning.

"Garik!" You turn at the sound of your name and see several of your friends lounging in front of a bakery shop.

"I was looking for you!" you call back, darting

across the road. "What's going on? Is there a dance tonight?"

One of your friends, a heavy-set youth named Kelder, sighs and shakes his head. "There's a dance, Gar, but the soldiers will be there, too. No one wants to be around those goons."

"Soldiers?" Mercenaries! you think. Then, remembering Simon's last words to you about becoming king, you start to feel cocky. "Well, maybe the soldiers won't be around forever. You never know what might happen."

Several of your friends look at you with narrowed eyes. "What do you mean by that?" Kelder asks suspiciously.

Did I say too much? you wonder. "Nothing," you say hastily. "I just—"

Your friends' attention shifts to something going on behind you. You turn around, suddenly aware of the sound of approaching footsteps.

"King Parthon comes!" a guardsman shouts. "Hail to the King of Avarlaine! Hail to King Parthon, the Conqueror!"

A ragged cheer goes up from the crowd around you. Several of your friends call out in dull voices. You remain silent, glaring at the guardsman.

As the first of the royal party walks past you, King Parthon comes into view down the street. As usual, he is surrounded by armed guards. The Crystal of Rulership, a sunlike topaz the size of a man's palm, hangs from a silver necklace over his robes.

"King Parthon!" an old beggar calls hoarsely. He falls to his knees as the king himself passes. "Have mercy and spare a few coins, sire, on this day of the festi—"

Without a word, King Parthon raises his foot and kicks the beggar under the chin, knocking the old man back from the street. Even the more calloused guardsmen around the king draw back in shock.

You gasp in horror, then feel a blinding rage seize your limbs. You can't believe the king would do something as harsh as kicking a beggar without cause!

Ignoring the cries of anger and dismay from the crowd, King Parthon smiles as he reaches up and grasps the sun-yellow crystal on his chest. You feel its influence steal over your mind. Involuntarily you shout aloud with a hundred other voices.

"HAIL, KING PARTHON!!!" you scream, at once proud of your monarch and horrified at your inability to control your actions. You KNOW he did wrong, but you join the roaring crowd and call praises at the top of your lungs as Parthon passes. Even the beggar, his mouth bleeding, calls his blessings.

King Parthon waves at the crowd and smiles. He drops his hand from the Crystal of Rulership, and you feel the power of the crystal pass from you. Rage replaces your charmed loyalty.

"That dog of a king!" you hiss through clenched teeth. Your friends mumble similar sen-

timents under their breath. The beggar is helped away by several townspeople.

You think again about the Red Crystal and the scroll in your pocket. If this quest will make me king, you think heatedly, now is the time to start it! And maybe my friends can help me.

You dig the box from your pocket and prepare to open it, then stop. Maybe the fewer the people that know about the Crystal, the safer you'll be from King Parthon.

1) If you go ahead and show your friends the Crystal, turn to page 20.

2) If you would undertake the quest on your own, turn to page 66.

"The only way to kill a troll is with fire!" Leo's words echo in your head.

The Burning Hands Spell! It isn't very powerful, but it's the only one you know. Using it is better than ending up as this troll's midnight snack! And this troll seems especially skinny and sickly-looking.

Putting your hands together, you point them at the troll and mouth the words to the spell. Flames shoot out from your fingers.

"Aighhhhh!" the troll shrieks in pain and fury. Suddenly, to your amazement, the monster collapses to the floor. You don't know whether its dead, or alive and just unconscious.

Then, acting on impulse, you take out the key that opened the mountain door and put it into the lock. You hear a click, and the door opens easily!

"Leo lied!" you mutter to yourself. "He said this key wouldn't work. I wonder what else he's lied about."

Leaving the mountain door open, you turn around and—avoiding the body of the troll—dash back down the corridor.

Please turn to page 92.

"I guess you're right," you say, studying the bars through the Red Crystal. "Those *do* look like bars to a jail cell. It's probably a warning to keep Goswar's friends from going in. Let's skip it and go on."

"Now we'll never know what was in there," says Leo, glancing back at the room wistfully.

"You go inside if you want to," you snap.

"No, no. That's all right. After all, *you're* the one with the Red Crystal."

"Yeah. Remember that!" you say, trying to impress the huge beast with your power.

Hoping you haven't walked right past the treasure room, you continue down the corridor.

Passing two double doors, you stop and examine these. There is nothing carved over them. Unlocked, they open easily.

"This can't be much—" you begin in disappointment, shoving the door wide open.

"WAIT!" Leo shrieks.

Too late!

Before your eyes floats the most gruesome, the most horrible creature you've ever seen. It has the head of a skull, and its eyes flash with a lurid light.

"Aieee!" you scream, backing away in terror as the thing approaches you, its skeletal hand outstretched. "What is it?"

"A lich!" gasps Leo. "It's an undead being impossible to kill unless you're an incredibly powerful wizard."

"Which I am not!" you moan. You try to run,

but your feet won't move. The lich comes closer and closer. You have no weapons—other than one stupid spell that would be useless here. You are doomed! Finally, in a panic, you throw at the undead monster the only thing you have available to you—the box with the Red Crystal inside.

"Oh, that was smart!" Leo snaps.

But, to your amazement, it works! The lich vanishes!

"What happened?" you ask, your whole body trembling. The box rests on the floor. Both you and Leo stare at it.

"The lich must have been an illusion old Goswar cooked up," Leo says suddenly. "The Red Crystal—being a stone of true seeing— destroyed the illusion!"

"That's fantas—Hey! Get away from there!" you shout.

With a flurry of feathers, Leo has bounded after the box that contains the Red Crystal.

The griffon is fast but hampered by his great size in this small room. Dashing ahead, you snatch the box right out from under his claw.

"Ha!" you shout in triumph, clutching the box. "Thought you'd pull a fast one—"

Suddenly you hear . . .

Please turn to page 132.

"I can't do it!" you whisper fearfully. "I can't make my feet move!"

You hear Parthon's guards coming closer and closer. The thought of capture fills you with terror, but not as much as the thought of stepping off into nothingness! That way lies certain death. At least with Parthon, you'll have a chance—maybe?—to survive.

Then you hear a flurry of wings, and Leo soars through the opening.

"Give me the Red Crystal!" he yells.

"What? Why?" you say, clutching the box to your chest.

"Give me the Red Crystal or Parthon will get it. Then nothing will stop his evil rule. I can enter this chamber. I know the secret to the riddle. 'The yellow rules, The red reveals, The blue destroys!' If I get the Blue Crystal, I can destroy Parthon's magic! That's what Goswar intended to do."

"There he is!" You hear a gruff yell.

"We've got him now! Parthon will reward us well for this!" says another voice.

Looking down the corridor, you see two of Parthon's guards thundering toward you.

1) You throw the Red Crystal to Leo Aquila. Turn to page 78.

2) You refuse to give up the crystal. Turn to page 82.

"I'll bet this is the treasure room! Those bars are a warning to anyone without the key." You examine the lock on the door, then the shape of the key. "Look, I was right! The key fits the lock. Boy, have we got it made!"

"I have a bad feeling about this . . ." Leo grumbles. "Uh, what pocket is that Crystal in?"

"Why?" you ask suspiciously, turning back toward the griffon.

"In case something happens to you, I won't have time to search your body. I want to know where it is now. We *are* partners, you know—"

"Now, look here, Leo Aquila—"

"Yes, Garik?"

You look up at the monster bird-lion for a moment, then think better of what you were going to say. It might not be wise to ruffle the feathers of so large a beast.

"Oh, nevermind," you say. "Just be quiet while I try to fit the key to this lock."

After you fumble with it for a few moments, the key fits. You turn it, slide the bolt back, and with trembling hands, slowly open the door.

Inside it's pitch-dark, and a horrible stench hits you. You hold your nose.

"Yuck!" says Leo, drawing his feathered head back quickly. Then you see his eyes flash in the torchlight. "Oh no!" he shouts, and, before you can stop him, the griffon is thundering off down the corridor, deeper into heart of the mountain.

"What a chicken you are, Leo!" you call after him. "It's just an empty room!"

Looking back inside the room, you still don't see anything. But suddenly you are overcome with a terrible feeling of evil. Immediately you become aware of something moving in the darkness—and it's coming toward you!

You start to back up. In your shaking hand, the blazing torch gives off a wavering light. Then something emerges into the light!

You nearly drop the torch, as you recognize the black wiry hair and huge green body.

"A troll!" you scream as you run toward the door. "Leo, do something!"

"What do you propose that I do?" The griffon's voice comes floating back down the corridor. "The only way to kill a troll is with fire! If you rip one apart, the pieces just come back together again!"

What you do now depends on decisions you've made before.

1) If you shut the door to the mountain, turn to page 24.

2) If you left the door to the mountain open, turn to page 84.

(*To help you remember, turn back to the choices on page 119.)

"Maybe we should shut the door," you say nervously. "I don't want Parthon coming in. We'll find another way out of this place!"

"It's your funeral," Leo remarks.

Ignoring the beast, you examine the door to see if you can figure out how to shut it. Finally you notice a small touchstone and put your fingers on it. You hear a grinding sound.

"Wait!" shouts Leo. "We don't have any—"

Too late. The door to the mountain slams shut with a bang.

"Light," the griffon finishes gloomily.

"Oh, yeah." Gulping, you peer into a darkness so intense that you instantly lose all sense of direction. Reaching out your hand, you touch Leo's feathered wing.

"Watch it!" the griffon snaps. "I hate to have people touch me!"

"I—I'm sorry," you quaver. "There must be a torch somewhere in here."

"Well, you can go groping around walls that are probably filled with traps, if you want to," Leo says.

"What are you going to do?" you ask.

"Think of how many different ways I can rip you to shreds!" Leo snarls.

Quickly, almost frantically, you grope along the walls, searching for a torch, and find one. Quickly you light it.

Please turn to page 46.

After a moment's hesitation, you reach down and open the box that does not seem to radiate magic.

"The Blue Crystal!" Leo says in awe.

Suddenly the door flies open with a bang. Whirling around, you see Parthon.

"Why, thank you for finding the Blue Crystal!" he sneers, looking over your shoulder. "I've waited a long time to get in this room. You will be suitably rewarded."

You watch as Parthon grasps the Yellow Crystal that he wears around his neck. He smiles and holds it toward you, as if to show it off. Your attention is gripped by the crystal, and suddenly his smile seems one of great friendliness and sincerity.

"Don't look at it, Garik!" Leo cries. "Grab the Blue Crystal!" There is a flurry of feathers as the griffon shields you from the crystal's power.

Shaking your head, you wonder what came over you. Then you reach into the secret chest and pull out the Blue Crystal.

"Kill the griffon!" Parthon shouts.

The guards rush at the griffon, swords drawn. And Leo Aquila has no room to fly!

You must do something quickly or Leo Aquila will die!

"Give me the Blue Crystal!" Leo shrieks.

You toss the Blue Crystal to the griffon, who catches it in his beak.

Please turn to page 85.

"A key!" you cry.

Reaching into a pile of treasure that's probably worth more than your whole village, you pull out a small golden key. "It was gleaming bright red when I looked through the jewel."

"Goswar's key!" Leo gasps. "I'd know it anywhere! You mean it was here all along, and I never noticed?" He glares at you suspiciously. "I think this is a trick! Give me that Red Crystal. Let me look through it! I'll see if the key's gleaming red or not!"

"Believe me or not, as you choose," you say, whisking the Red Crystal back in the box. "I've got the key and the Red Crystal. Simon told me that if anything happens to me, the Crystal will go back to him."

"Yes, but I'll get the key!" Leo says. His beak opens threateningly.

"But you don't know your way around inside, do you? We're likely to find traps all over, and if this Red Crystal was so important, probably the only way we'll see the traps is with its help."

You're guessing, but you know you're right when Leo's beak snaps shut. Moodily, he sits back down.

"That may be true," he says, sulking. "But I know the riddle!"

"So?" you ask. "I know the riddle, too—"

"Bah! Even Parthon knows the riddle. What I meant to say was I'm the only one who knows the answer!"

"Then we'll work together," you say reluc-

tantly. You don't trust this griffon one bit, but there doesn't seem to be much choice. Seeing the suspicious expression in Leo's eyes, you know that he doesn't like this partnership any better than you do.

You only hope you can figure out the riddle before you reach the Blue Crystal!

"All right. Partners," Leo says ungraciously. Then he turns brisk. "See the lock?"

You turn back to the door. A small golden lock glows in the moonlight. You step over and fit the key into it. The huge iron door that almost seems like part of the mountain slides open.

Leo's eyes glitter eagerly, and he thrusts his head inside even before the door opens completely. You hesitate. It is dark and gloomy inside. Foul-smelling air flows out, making you gag.

"Well, come on!" Leo snaps, turning around. "We haven't got time to fool around!"

"We don't?" you hedge. "Maybe we should wait until daylight."

"Then Parthon will be the third member of our party," Leo says sarcastically.

"Parthon!" you repeat, stunned.

"Certainly!" Leo shrugs his wings. "He has a guard posted in the castle that does nothing all day but stare at my aerie through a spyglass. When he sees that the door is open, he'll be up here in no time! They've probably already sounded the alarm!"

"I thought you said the only way up here was on your back!" you shout accusingly.

"I lied," Leo says calmly.

Glaring furiously at the griffon, you realize that if he's right, and Parthon *has* found some way up here, you'll have to hustle to get the Blue Crystal first. Stomping angrily, you enter the mountain.

"Maybe we can close the door from the inside," you suggest. "That would keep Parthon out."

"And us in," Leo remarks coolly. "Goswar had a different key to get back out. You might find the key inside. And then again—you might not."

"Is there any other way out? There must be a way to get through from the castle."

"Maybe there is, and maybe there isn't," the griffon says cunningly. "It's been a long time. I have a short memory. Besides, I've never been inside, remember?"

That's not much help! You don't trust Leo Aquila. You certainly don't want to be stuck inside this mountain forever with a crazy griffon! But you don't want Parthon coming in the door either.

1) You decide to shut the door. Turn to page 115.

2) You decide to leave the door open. Turn to page 23.

You suppress your wild thought. A Burning Hands spell would just make the king angry, and he'd be even tougher on you than he would be otherwise. Besides, it might not even work.

You resign yourself to fate.

"I'm still not talking," you tell the king defiantly, feeling very frightened inside. "Do your worst."

Parthon stares at you and toys with the Yellow Crystal. "Making you talk with the Crystal of Rulership would be too easy," he finally decides. He motions to a guard. "Take him to the torture room. Make him talk there."

Your heart sinks. An enormous, burly guardsman with an evil grin grabs you by the arm and drags you out of the throne room. You try to stop him, but he just laughs and ignores your struggles.

A few minutes later he pulls you into the torture room and quickly chains you to a wall next to where an old skeleton hangs suspended. "I'll be back in an hour, so don't go anywhere." He leaves, chuckling.

When the guard shuts the door, you pull mightily against your chains, but it's like trying to pull a mountain down. You give up, sagging against the wall.

"I'm doomed," you moan. "I'll become the next skeleton."

"You would if it weren't for me," a feminine voice says from the locked door. You look up in surprise as a key rattles in the lock.

"Who's there?" you ask in confusion. No one answers, but moments later the door creaks open, and a young girl with curly brown hair steps into the room and shuts the door again.

The girl looks you over and sighs in disgust. "Grandpa was right. You *are* an airhead, letting yourself be caught and losing the Red Crystal. I ought to leave you here."

The girl pulls the Red Crystal from her pocket and puts it in one of your manacled hands, then takes a key from her pocket and sets you free.

"How did you get the crystal?" you ask in amazement. "And who are you? How did you get in here? And—"

"Wait a minute," the girl says, and motioning you to be quiet, she listens at the door. You wait, and soon the girl nods her head in satisfaction and returns to you. "Thought I heard someone outside," she says.

"Well," she begins, "I'm Andria. My grandpa is Simon. The Red Crystal popped back to him when you lost it, so he gave it to me, and I sneaked into the castle. I know how to do things like that. Besides, I used to live in this place with Grandpa. I know it inside out. And," she finishes, "I'm going with you to find the Blue Crystal."

"Oh," you say, speechless in the face of so much information given so fast. "Well, let's find some way to get out of here."

"Easier said than done. I had to conk a guard on the head. They may have found him by now. We could have some trouble leaving here."

You look around the torture room at all the black iron instruments, racks, and chains. A few skeletons—as well as one body that hasn't yet become a skeleton—lean against a far wall. You shudder. "The sooner we can go, the better I'll like it," you remark.

"Same here," Andria says. "This place used to be one of old King Goswar's magic-using rooms. It doesn't look as nice as it used to."

Maybe it would be worth using the Crystal of Divination to look around the room. You recall your father saying that "no room has as many secret's as a wizard's room."

Then again, you think as a skeleton catches your eye, maybe it would be better just to leave.

1) If you want to check out the torture room with the Red Crystal, turn to page 11.

2) If you'd rather try to get away from the castle right away, turn to page 124.

One more look at the skeletons in the torture chamber decides the issue. "Let's get out of here!" you whisper to Andria.

She nods quickly, reaching for the door handle. "I'm with you."

With you both pulling on the heavy door, you fling it open and rush out . . . and come to a screeching halt.

Four huge guardsmen are waiting for you with swords drawn. They smile wickedly as they see you.

"The king will be down in a moment," one guard says. "He wanted to join you in that chamber. Too bad you had to spoil his little surprise."

The guards herd you both back into the torture room, leaving the door open for the king. A guard tries to take the Red Crystal away from you, but it vanishes into thin air the moment he touches it, teleporting itself back to Simon.

"That's going to make the king real mad," the guard says with a sigh. "I really feel for you, kid."

Your heart drops into your shoes. You don't need another look at the bones and torture devices in the room to know that you've reached

THE END

Yellow and red arc from your fingers. The giant cat crouches, ears flattened back, eyes wide.

The flames strike the cat on its tail, setting its fur afire.

"RREEEOOOOWWW!!!" the cat howls, almost deafening you. Like a bolt of lightning, the flaming monster shoots past you into the darkness down the hall.

Silence reigns. After what seems like an hour, Andria asks weakly, "Is it gone? I don't want to turn around and see it."

You study the darkness and see no sign of the cat. "It's gone," you say. You can't resist adding, "Chicken!"

You expect some scathing reply, but Andria just mumbles something under her breath as she leans against the wall.

Finally you say quietly, "Let's go."

Andria follows you through the double doors, her face still pale. "I've always *liked* cats," she whispers.

The dusty corridor continues for a hundred feet more, then ends in another door. Andria sees no trap, and you open the door easily.

Beyond the door is a small room lavishly decorated with colorful tapestries, rugs, and furniture. Several beautiful chests stand in one corner. The dagger's light reveals no guards, human or otherwise, inside the room.

Andria, feeling better now, takes a look inside the room herself. "No traps here either," she says. "Unless those chests in the corner are trapped."

"Do you suppose this could be the treasure room where the Blue Crystal is hidden?" you ask at last. "The chests might be full of gems and coins. But I guess we've got to find the Blue Crystal first."

"Maybe the Red Crystal could help find the blue one," Andria suggests.

"That's an idea. Let's find out."

❖ *Study the room shown on page 129 through your Red Crystal.*

"All right!" you yell. "Look, under the rug there! Lift it up! I think the crystal's under there in one of *those* chests!"

"What chests?" Andria says as she pulls the rug aside.

"One of these chests," you say with a grand bow as a secret space in the floor is revealed. In it nestle three small chests. The one in the middle is open and empty, but the two on either side of it have small gold latches on them and are closed tight.

"I saw one of the chests, this one"—you gesture to the one on the right—"radiate light as if it had something magical inside it!" you say excitedly. "This is the one we want!"

You start to reach for it, but Andria stops you. "Wait, wait, wait! My King Goswar was the kind who'd put a trap on a trap. If you open the wrong chest, I bet it will fry your hand off."

You withdraw your hand quickly. "Uh, well . . .

wait a minute. I remember I saw some writing on the wall, next to the chests. Let me check it again."

You look through the crystal and see the following inscription above the hole:

The yellow rules, the red reveals,
The blue destroys and is concealed.

"This puts a new light on things," you remark after reading it aloud. "But what's it mean?"

"The riddle of the griffon implied that the Blue Crystal brings change and can overthrow the Yellow Crystal," Andria says suddenly. "Maybe—"

You cut her off, thinking the same thoughts. "Maybe the Blue Crystal *destroys* magic! Maybe it eats magic or changes it or ruins it. And the Blue Crystal is concealed . . . here."

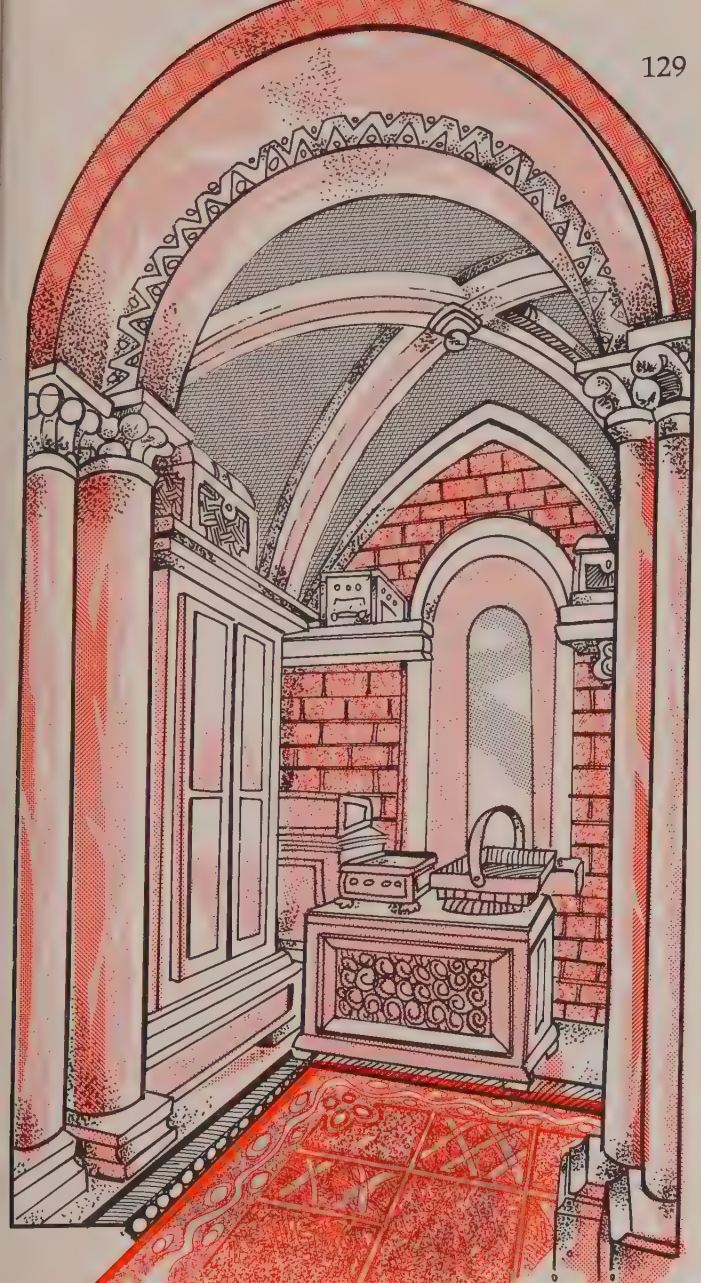
Andria summons her courage and pokes around in the empty box with her dagger. "It isn't sitting invisibly in this one," she says. "So it has to be in one of the other two boxes. But which one?"

You think carefully. One box radiated magic. The Blue Crystal is magical. But the Blue Crystal is *concealed*, and it might cancel magic, meaning you might not detect it as magical with your Crystal of Divination. This is so confusing!

"Well, I'm not gonna live forever," you mutter. "I'll open—"

1) "—the box that doesn't radiate magic." Turn to page 27.

2) "—the box that *does* radiate magic." Turn to page 68.



"I'll use the crystal first," you whisper. "If you stand next to me, no one behind us will see me use it."

Andria nods and stands behind you. You pull the Crystal of Divination from your pocket and hold it toward the doors.

❖ *Use your Red Crystal to look at the picture on the next page.*

"Andria!" you yell, almost dropping the crystal in your haste to get away from the doors. "Kitty's coming!"

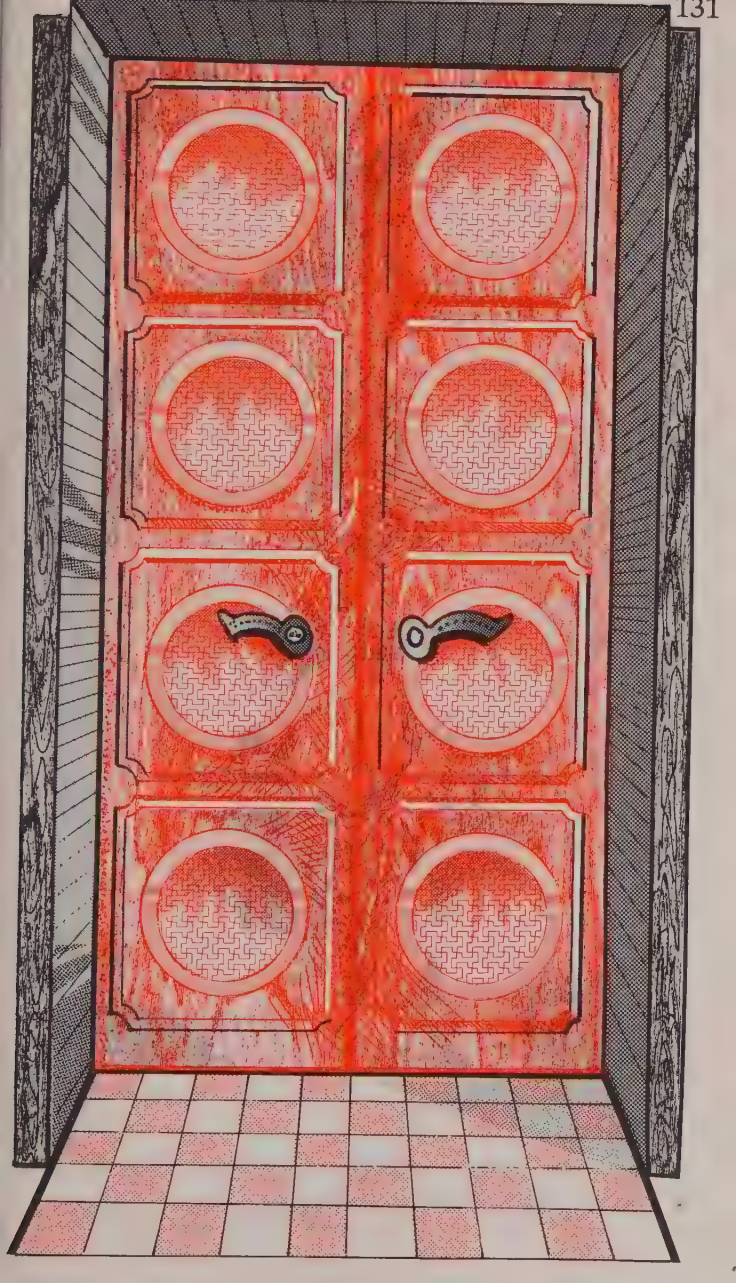
"What?" Andria turns around just as the doors part. A shaggy, feline, as large as a tiger, presses through the doors.

Andria makes a long, squeaking noise as she inhales. Her face turns a deathly white and she freezes.

You freeze, too, but your mind works furiously. Andria's dagger would be useless against that monster. The huge, lynxlike cat inspects you up and down. Then it slowly stalks toward you, huge green eyes burning like twin fires in the dagger's light.

Burning Hands. You stretch out your hands, fingers spread, palms down, thumbs touching. Power burns in your mind, clear and hot. The words of the spell tumble off your tongue.

Please turn to page 125.



"Land over there—there on that ledge, Cyril. Argh! What a stupid beast!"

"That's Parthon's voice!" you cry. "You were right. He did find a way up here!"

"Yes, on his wyvern, that poor excuse for a flying creature," Leo snarls. "I've fought to keep that maniac monster out of Goswar's caverns more times than I care to count. Wyverns may be dumb, but they love to attack—viciously."

"Oh, no!" you say, realization washing over you. "We left the mountain door open."

You break into a run down the corridor, torchlight dancing wildly around you. Suddenly, though, you come to a dead stop!

Before you is an open doorway. You see nothing beyond but darkness. Cautiously, you peer inside and hold your torch aloft.

You stare down into inky blackness. "It's an abyss. There's nothing here! We're trapped!"

"Look above the door, fool!" Leo pokes you impatiently with his claw.

"You idiots! Just land those blasted beasts and follow me! I swear, once this business is over, I'm trading these in on real dragons!"

"Wonderful!" groans Leo. "Parthon's brought his guards as well. Hurry up, kid!"

Holding the torch high, you look up. Above you is another griffon carving. This is different from the first one you saw. The creature is in a different stance.

"I don't like that at all," Leo sneers. "Doesn't do me justice."

Taking the box out of your pocket, you remove the Red Crystal and look through it.

❖ *Look through the Red Crystal at the picture on page 133 to see what the carving reveals.*

Now you can see that the griffon is perched on what appears to be the railing of a stairway! That gives you an idea. Quickly you look through the crystal at the empty darkness before you.

"I was right! There's a stairway!" you shout. "A stairway leading down."

But when you look without the crystal, all you see is the empty blackness again.

"I don't believe you!" Leo snaps. "Let *me* have the crystal! I'll give it back."

"No!" you say, putting it back into the box.

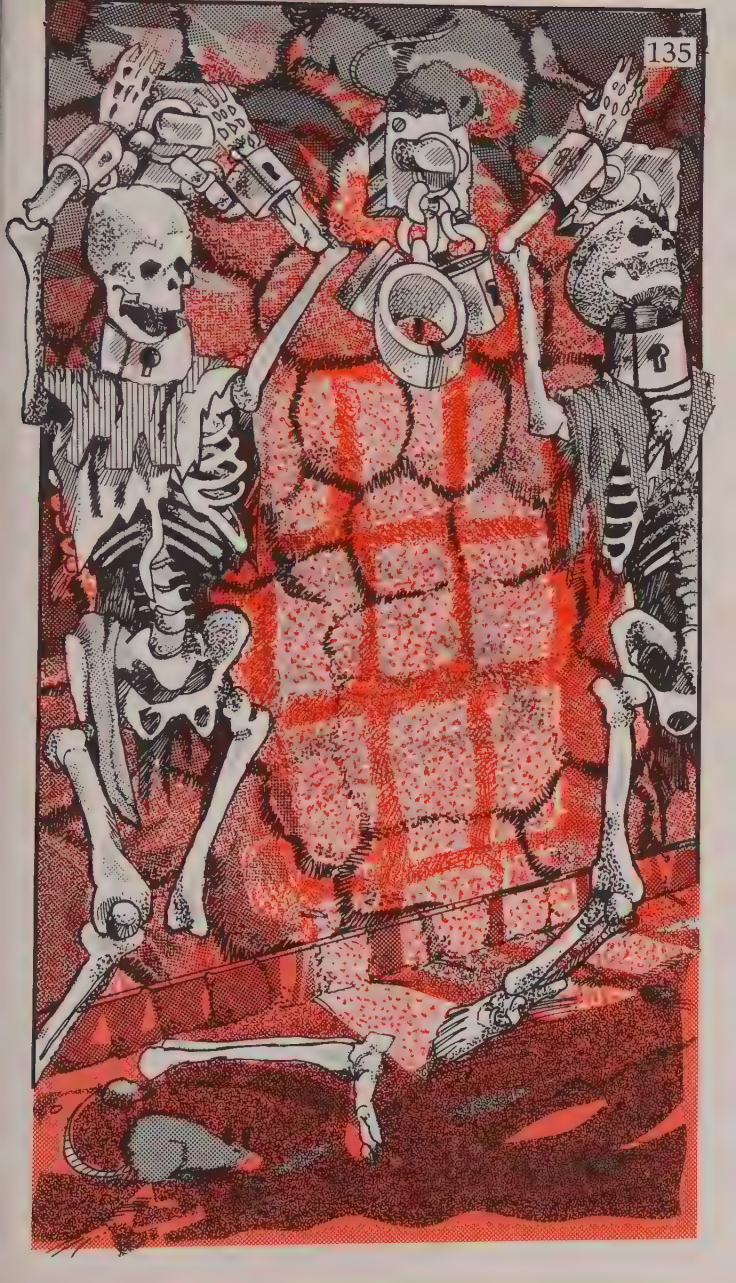
"Very well, you go first," Leo says slyly.

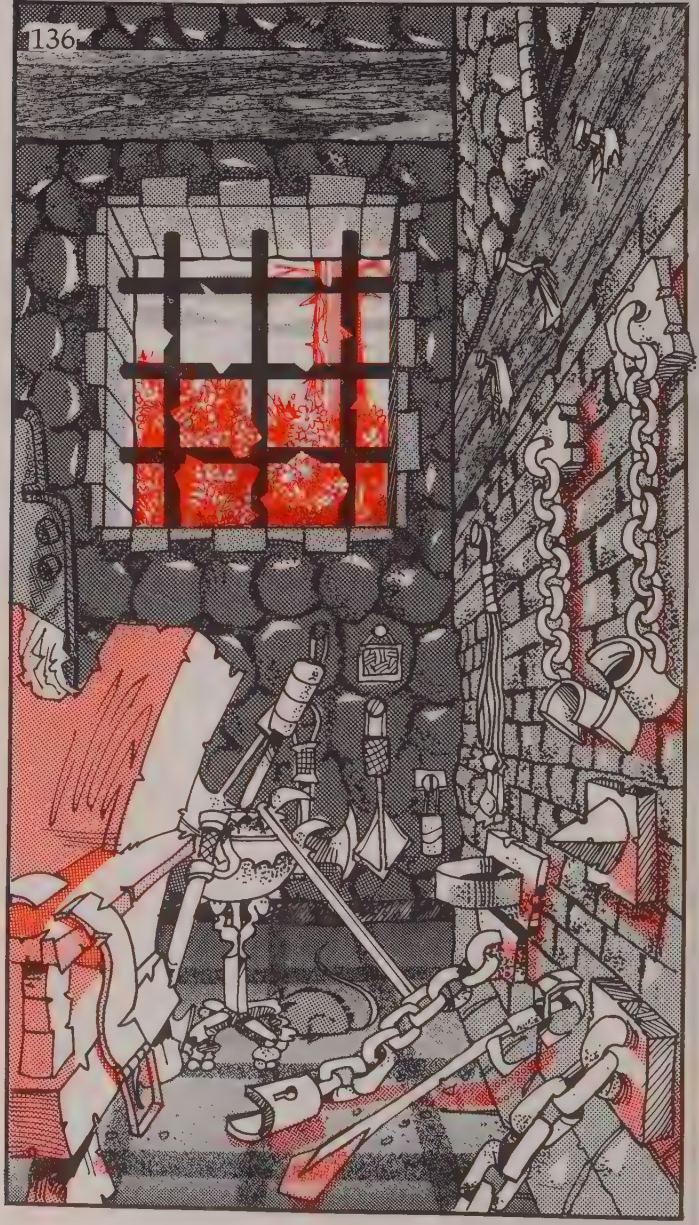
Looking into the blackness, you swallow a lump in your throat. You *know* the staircase is there. You saw it! You just have to convince your feet it's there!

Is getting captured by Parthon better than falling into a bottomless pit?

1) You trust the Red Crystal. Step out into the blackness and turn to page 58.

2) You can't make yourself go forward. You must face Parthon. Turn to page 112.





A window is a window. You raise the red Crystal of Divination and look through it at the real window in the wall of the torture chamber.

❖ *What do you see through your Red Crystal when you look at the picture on the previous page?*

Oh oh! Wrong choice. Instead of something magical, all you see are a few pigs and chickens, peering back at you with great curiosity.

The torture room overlooks a farmyard! You picked the wrong window!

At that moment, the door to the chamber bursts open. You hear Andria shriek. Heavy boots stomp across the floor toward you. As the guardsmen seize your arms, you know that your quest to get the Blue Crystal and destroy King Parthon has reached

THE END

. . . another carving of a griffon. But this figure seems to be trying to point to something. A beam of red light shoots out from the griffon, shining on a hole in the wall. The hole is an odd shape, and it, too, glows with a bright red light.

"It's the shape of the Red Crystal!" you cry.

"That's it!" Leo Aquila says eagerly. "Put the crystal in the hole. This must be the way to open the door!"

Your hands trembling, you fit the Red Crystal into the keyhole. Above you, you hear Parthon's voice ordering the guards down the staircase. With a sinking heart, you realize that they can see the red glow now, too.

The Red Crystal fits easily into the keyhole. There is a click, and the door swings open.

You retrieve the crystal and then find yourself trying to get through the door at the same time as the griffon. After a brief struggle—and a mouthful of feathers—you both charge through.

You find yourself in a small but beautiful room. Thick, bright-colored rugs cover the floor and intricate tapestries decorate the walls. Chests and trunks in great numbers clutter the floor, all of them closed and seemingly locked. You groan. It will take days to search this room! And some of the chests are probably trapped.

"How are we ever going to find the Blue Crystal in this mess?" you ask Leo in despair.

"How many times do I have to tell you?" the griffon asks impatiently. "Remember the riddle—'The red reveals!'"

"You're right!" Raising the Red Crystal to your eyes, you scan the room.

❖ *Turn to page 129 and use your Red Crystal to study the room. Then return here.*

"There's something glowing red under that rug. Lift it up!" you direct the griffon.

You hear Parthon's men clattering down the stairs. While Leo is lifting the rug, you run over and shut the door.

"That should keep them out!" you mutter.

"Unless he uses the Yellow Crystal somehow!" Leo says, lifting up the rug with his beak.

You never thought of that.

Beneath the rug is a secret compartment holding three small chests. The one in the middle is open and empty, but the two on either side of it are closed.

Holding up the Red Crystal, you look at the chests again.

"This one," you say, pointing to the chest on the right, "radiates red light, as if it were magical. But there's nothing coming out of the chest on the left."

"Be careful which one you touch," Leo warns. "Goswar was an expert at traps!"

"Which one?" you cry. "There must be a clue!"

There's a sudden pounding at the door, and you know you must do something quickly!

Then the pounding stops. The sudden hush makes you turn toward the door.

"Yellow Crystal! I command you! Open this door!" It is Parthon's voice!

"Can he do that?" you gasp. "Will it open for the Yellow Crystal?"

"Well, we can wait and find out!" Leo says sarcastically. "Or we can get busy and find the Blue Crystal!"

"Yeah," you mutter. Studying the chests again, you notice an inscription above them.

The yellow rules, the red reveals,
The blue destroys and is concealed

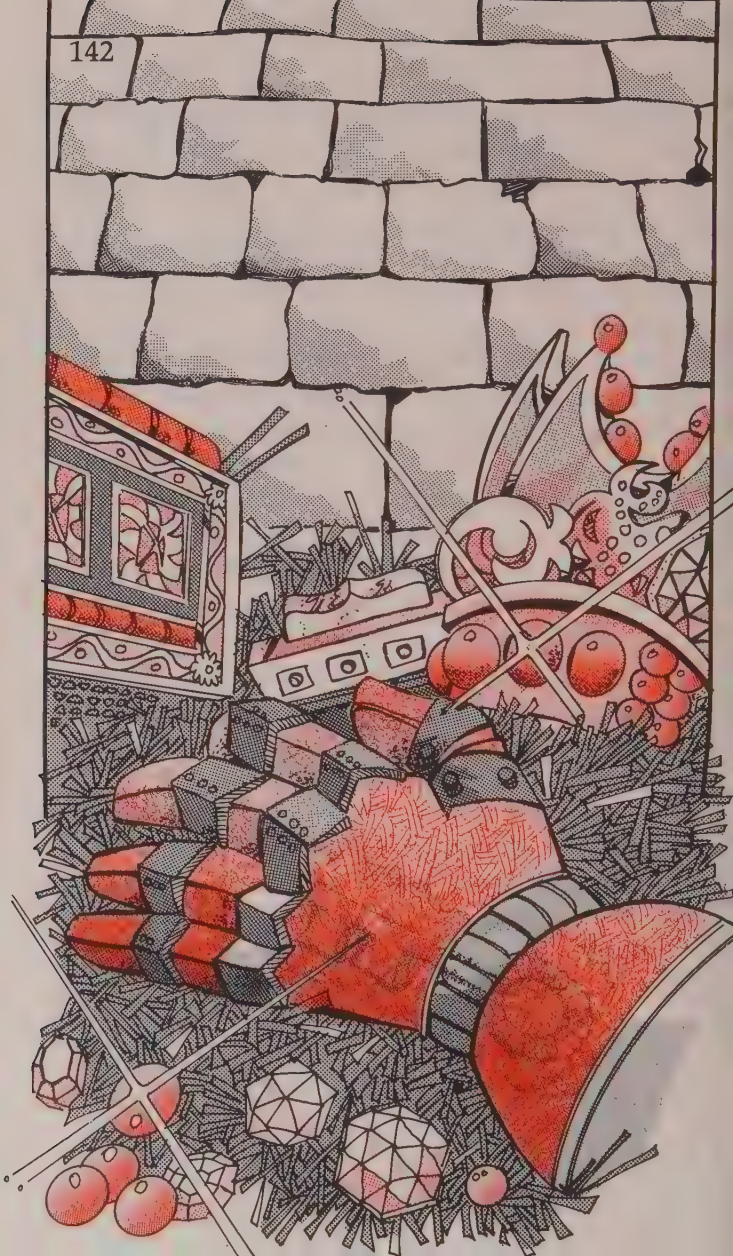
"Oh, crumbs, another riddle! . . . Blue destroys. Blue destroys." Desperately you try to figure out what it means. The noise Parthon is making breaks your concentration.

You think carefully. One box radiates magic. The Blue Crystal has to be magical. But the Blue Crystal *destroys.* Maybe it destroys magic!

If you have solved the riddle, you know which box to open.

1) You decide to open the box that radiates magic; turn to page 68.

2) You decide to open the box that seems nonmagical; turn to page 116.



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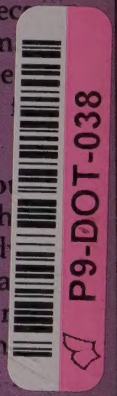

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